AMERICAN CHURCH ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL CATASTROPHE:

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PREFACE

This paper examines the response of the American churches to the Panic of 1873. For the purpose of this study, the Panic is not considered as an economic or financial event per se but rather as an example of social catastrophe, that is, a severe, disruptive event in society. The thesis of the paper is that the response of the churches was conditioned by their theological premises and that any significant shift in the attitude of the churches toward social reform or other problems generated by the Panic had to be accompanied by a concomitant revision of theology. It is, in a sense, part of the broader problem of the intellectual accomodation to urbanized, industrial society as it developed in the United States after the Civil War.

In writing this paper I have received assistance from many people. Professor Charles E. Rosenberg of the University of Pennsylvania directed the work from its beginning in his seminar. Claude Welch, Berg Professor of Religious Thought at the University of Pennsylvania, read the entire manuscript and gave generously of his time and advice. Professors Thomas C. Cochran, Wallace E. Davies, and Don Yoder, all of the University of Pennsylvania, suggested sources and gave assistance in the early stages of the work. I am also indebted to many friends and colleagues with whom I have discussed some of the ideas presented in this thesis. Of course, I accept responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation.

I have also received courteous assistance from the librarians and staffs of the following libraries: Van Pelt Library of the

University of Pennsylvania; the Library of Congress; the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia; the American Catholic Historical Society Library at St. Charles Seminary, Overbrook, Pennsylvania; the Charles P. Krauth Memorial Library at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mt.Airy, Pennsylvania; the Methodist Historical Society at St. George's Methodist Church, Philadelphia; the Library Company of Philadelphia; the Free Library of Philadelphia; and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

My greatest debt is to my wife, Donna Evans Cashdollar, who constantly encouraged me with her patience and understanding.

April, 1969 C. D. C.

INTRODUCTION

Phillips Brooks, one of the truly great American preachers of the nineteenth century, writing on the eve of the Episcopal Church Congress in 1874, left us a revealing evaluation of the emotional state of the church in the 1870's. "There is," he said, "a curious sort of sensitiveness and expectancy everywhere in the Church, a sort of feeling and fear that things cannot remain forever just as they are now. . . ."[1] The description was very apt because the decade of the 1870's was a period characterized by great and rapid changes in the American style of life. There was, therefore, the expectancy, and also the curiousness and fear which come to a people or to an institution unsure of little about the future except that it will be very different from everything they now know.

The American churches and the American people found themselves confronted with a novel social environment which they did not understand and which some were not certain that they wished to understand. The agrarian setting of the early nineteenth century American in which they had grown to adulthood had been replaced by an increasingly urbanized industrial society. The United States was now a nation with burgeoning industrial capacities, with rapidly expanding urban centers, and a railway system which enabled it to span the continent in fact as well as in name. But the industrial age also brought with it a host of problems--labor unrest, urban crime, extremes of wealth and

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[1] quoted by Raymond W. Albright, A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1964), 306.

poverty greater than America had ever known, and astonishing amounts of political and corporate corruption. To a large extent, by the 1870's, the pre-Civil War idealism which had fostered the reform movements of that period had faded, tarnished by long years of war and mellowed by the now advanced age of its adherents.

All of these elements went together to make up what might be called the "challenge of industrial America."[2] By its very comprehensiveness, it demanded an equally thorough examination of the viability of the intellectual and institutional bases of American culture. The successful completion of this task would take several decades, but by the 1870's it had begun. It was this situation which caused the "curious sort of sensitiveness and expectancy" which Brooks noticed in the church. It is also what makes this decade a fascinating and fruitful problem for examination by intellectual historians.

This paper intends to examine one aspect of this intellectual ferment, namely the theological, as it is reflected in the response of the churchmen to the Panic of 1873. Historians have long found social catastrophes, and by this we mean a severe disruption or crisis in a society, to be useful in their reconstruction and interpretation of the past. It is in this sense, and not as an economic phenomenon per se, that the Panic of 1873 is here to be considered. Such catas-

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[2]This, of course, has been the theme of several books, each using its own name for the new industrial society. See for instance, Samuel P. Hays, The Response to Industrialism (Chicago: Chicago, 1957), Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1927), Arthur Schlesinger, The Rise of the City (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1933); for description of the churches and the new age see Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (N.Y.: Harper, 1949), Aaron I. Abell, The Urban Impact on American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard, 1943), and American Catholicism and Scoial Action (Garden City, N.Y.: Hanover, 1960).

trophes have, in the first place, been used by many historians simply because they are spectacular and therefore excessively evident and noticeable. Events such as wars, depressions, epidemics, natural disasters, famines, and the like have therefore been made to serve, not always legitimately one fears, as reference points for the structuring of other events. On a more profound level, many historians have spent long hours--and long books--attempting to discern the impact of such critical events on the subsequent course of history. So it has been that historians have sought the social consequences of the American Revolution, the effect of the Civil War upon Southern social structure or upon Northern industry, the influence of Verdun upon the French military mind, the influence of the Time of Troubles on seventeenth century Russia, and in countless volumes, the diplomatic and social consequences of the World Wars.

All of this is an eminently legitimate task and one which has been well pursued by Henry F. May with regard to the Panic of 1873 and the churches.[3] But it is not the relationship sought in this study. It is also possible, and perhaps more profitable to the intellectual historian, to use social catastrophes as a mirror to study less spectacular and more evolutionary aspects of culture. This type of study is most valuable because social catastrophes place the ordinary under stress and thereby make it stand out in a clearer, more vivid fashion. It is in this sense that this paper will use the Panic of 1873 as a convenient method of illuminating the theological ferment of the 1870's.

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[3]Henry F. May, The Protestant Churches and Industrial America (N.Y.: Harper, 1949).

John Kenneth Galbraith, recognizing the value of such an appraisal, comments in his penetrating study of the 1929 crash that 1929 was

> one of those years that marvelously illuminate human motives and the very wellsprings of human behavior. Historians and novelists have always known that tragedy wonderfully reveals the nature of man. But, while they have made rich use of war, revolution, and poverty, they have been singularly neglectful of financial panics. And one can relish the varied idiocy of human action during a panic to the full, for, while it is a time of great tragedy, nothing is being lost but money. [4]

What social catastrophe does then, is to reveal things which ordinarily go unseen. Again to quote Galbraith, in 1929, "things that in other times were concealed by a heavy facade of dignity now stood exposed, for the panic suddenly, almost obscenely, snatched the facade away."[5]

This paper, therefore, is in no way an economic history of the panic of 1873. Nor is it primarily a study of the impact of the crisis upon the churches or even of the social and charitable activities of the churches during the panic. It is a study of the theological and social attitudes of theologians begun from the perspective of their verbal response to this particular social catastrophe, the Panic of 1873. Certainly, this is not the only approach one could have taken. One could have just as easily used the panic to study social conditions during the depression (as Samuel Rezneck has done[6]) or to study the

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[4]John Kenneth Galbraith, The Great Crash, 1929 (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1954), 2-3.

[5]Ibid., 3.

[6]Samuel Rezneck, "Distress, Relief, and Discontent in the United States during the Depression of 1873-78," Journal of Political Economy LVIII (Dec., 1950), 494-512.

condition of the economy or the evolution of economic thought or even to write a general history of American life in the 1870's with the panic as the focal point (much as Galbraith has done for the 1929 crash). I have chosen, however, to pursue this more restricted goal in the belief that a reexamination of the churches and their theology in this fashion might prove suggestive of new emphases or shades of interpretation of the American churches as they confronted industrial society.

All of this emphasis is not to deny that there was a causal relationship between the panic and the evolution of theological thought. So much of what the historian finds revealed in the wake of the panic was also perceived with equal clarity by the more alert churchmen of the time and therefore was bound to affect their thinking also. As Morton White has noted, social catastrophes "make so much seem absurd and so much seem old-fashioned that they serve as convenient reference points. When they do not literally force us to put down all our books, they make us pinch the corners of pages, and send us off in new directions."[7]

This, one suspects, is the real theme of Henry F. May's Protestant Churches and Industrial America when he insists that "until they were shocked by a series of violent social conflicts, most Protestant spokesmen continued to insist that all was well."[8] And again, "the immediate cause of this important change /from orthodoxy to the social gospel/ lay neither in theological innovation nor in the world 'climate

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[7]Morton White, Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism (N.Y.: Viking, 1949), 3.

[8]May, Protestant Churches, 63.

of opinion' but in the resistless intrusion of social crisis, and particularly in a series of large-scale, violent labor conflicts."[9]

Be that as it may, one wonders if he has not gone a bit too far when he argues, even emphasizes, that "no direct relation existed in the post-war period or later, between liberal theology and progressive social thought."[10] Might the problem not be more complex than May intimates? In fact, what a study of the response of the leading conservative theologians to the social crisis of 1873 reveals is that the shock of financial collapse and social upheaval was not sufficient to provide a new direction to the American churches. Rather, what the panic reveals is that when the staid conservative theologian was placed under stress by the intrusion of social catastrophe, his reaction was not to alter or even to question the views which he already held, but rather to cling to the familiar in the face of the crisis in an even stronger manner. And, of course, such a tendency is not a surprising psychological phenomenon.

This paper will examine the response of these churchmen as it is revealed through their periodicals. The coverage of the paper is confined to the period from the initial market collapse of September 18, 1873 through the adjournment of Congress the following June. In dealing with the church press, this research has considered scholarly seminary journals, monthly denominational magazines, and most commonly, weekly newspapers. The study has sampled all the major Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Because the church

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[9] Ibid., 91.

[10] Ibid., 80.

press was edited and controlled by academic theologians, usually professors in a near-by seminary, a large portion of this paper will be devoted to an examination of the theological framework within which these editors operated.

Before we begin, a few words of caution are in order. In evaluating the men discussed in this paper, the assumption is made that they held their beliefs sincerely and acted consistently with them. This is not to deny that the social views of these conservative theologians served the pecuniary interests of powerful laymen and that some of these men, business leaders and the like, may well have held to ostensibly religious positions for purely selfish reasons. But it is not these men with which this study is concerned but rather with the academic theologians and other high ranking church leaders. This is not to minimize conservative theology as a mere excuse for social conservatism founded basically upon more material motives, but merely to stress that the subjects of this paper consciously held to theological conservatism per se.

Secondly, it must be cautioned that the observations made in this paper must be confined to those leaders who, because of their own personal make-up, acted consistently upon the premises of formal theology. This is not to deny that there were those within the church, especially at the parish level, who were not so confined and who were more practically oriented. But this paper is confined to those who felt compelled to act consistently with their creed or if they must act differently could not do so until they had logically modified their system to justify that course of action. And although this group was not large, it was composed of men who, as academic theo-

logians and high church officials exerted an influence in the institutional church beyond their numbers.

If it is difficult for the twentieth century mind with its more pragmatic approach to the world of ideas, to accept the proposition that men could be bound within the formality of an intellectual system, let it be remembered that this was a century of formalism, the age which spawned the formal philosophical systems of Hegel, Comte, and Marx and that it is no more absurd to imagine academic theologians becoming ensnared within the intricacies of a theological system than it is to imagine someone becoming ensnared within the intricacies of one of these more secular systems. And, if one insists on adding a purely cynical dimension, it can be said that the vested interest of the academic theologians and church officials was not material or pecuniary but rather the survival of their theolgical synthesis, sanctified in many cases by publication and years of teaching, and in the survival of the church as an institution founded and nourished by that theology. It can, therefore, in any case be discussed as an intellectual problem. Let us then turn our attention to the Panic of 1873 and the verbal response which it drew from the church press.

"THE CRASH"

At eleven o'clock on the morning of September 18, 1873, the great Philadelphia private banking house of Jay Cooke closed its doors. Tacked to the outside was a short notice:

> TO THE PUBLIC:
> We regret to be obliged to announce that, owing to unexpected demands on us, our firm has been obliged to suspend payment. In a few days we eill be able to present a statement to our creditors, until which time we must ask for their patient consideration. We believe our assets to be greatly in excess of our liabilities.
>
> JAY COOKE AND COMPANY[1]

The suspension of this great Civil War financier set in motion a series of economic crisés whose repercussions did not subside until 1879. The failure took the nation by surprise, one editor describing it as a "thunder-clap in a clear sky."[2] So great was the amazement that in some quarters it was written off as "some error or derangement." It was simply im possible to believe that there could be any real, genuine difficulty.[3] But, of course, the cpllapse was very real and, as is often the case, retrospect showed that there had been ample warning signs of the coming disaster.

In the spring of 1873 there had been a minor disturbance on Wall Street at the time of the Credit Mobilier scandal. By the summer, however, most people appeared confident that the economy was sound. Money was relatively easy and by most indications things were going

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[1]Ellis P. Oberholtzer, Jay Cooke: Financier of the Civil War (Philadelphia: Jacobs, 1907), II, 424.

[2]Philadelphia Press, Sept. 19, 1873.

[3]North American, Sept. 19, 1873.

well. Underneath this overt confidence, however, there remained a resevoir of concern over the state of the economy which continued to increase quietly over the summer months.[4]

Much of this disquietude was centered upon what more cautious investors and business journals (such as the Commercial and Financial Chronicle and the Railroad Gazette) felt was an overly rapid expansion in rails.[5] This uneasiness was measurably increased by a growing suspicion of dishonesty within the higher business and banking circles. Much of this was still the result of the Credit Mobilier affair, but it was emphasized again by the fiscal failure of the Brooklyn Trust Company in late July, a failure due primarily to a sizeable overdraft by the bank's former president and significant loans made to other officers of the bank. The failure of this bank, the agent for the New Haven and Willimantic Rail Road, added to the growing fears that the investments in rails were not as secure as advertized.

In the early part of September, tensions mounted again when the loan market grew tighter as the result of an unusually early drain of funds to the West to facilitate the fall crop movement. On September

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[4]Unless otherwise noted, the material for the chronological portions of this chapter is gathered from the following standard sources: Irwin Unger, The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865-1879 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964); Ernest Ray McCarthy, Crisis of 1873 (mineograph printing, Univ. of Nebraska, Ph.D. thesis, 1935); O. M. W. Sprague, History of Crises under the National Banking System (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910); Alexander D. Noyes, Thirty Years of American Finance (N.Y.: Putnam, 1898); Henrietta Larson, Jay Cooke, Private Banker (Cambridge: Harvard, 1936); Samuel Rezneck, "Distress, Relief, and Discontent in the United States during the Depression of 1873-78," Journal of Political Economy, LVIII (Dec., 1950), 494-512; and Rendigs Fels, "American Business Cycles, 1865-79," American Economic Review, XLI (June, 1951), 325-349.

[5]Commercial and Financial Chronicle, Sept. 20, 1873; Railroad Gazette, Sept. 27, 1873.

8 came another real sign of trouble as the New York Warehouse and Security Company, which was engaged in the financing of the Missouri Kansas, and Texas Railroad, suspended payment. Five days later, Kenyon, Cox, and Company, financier of the Canadian Southern Railroad, also suspended. These two failures, the second of which involved Daniel Drew, added to the tightness of the market for railroad securities but did not set off any drastic activity in the stock market, perhaps because, as some suggested, few people really expected those companies to be completely sound.

But the failure of Jay Cooke on the 18th was another matter. It did shake business confidence to the core. Cooke, after all, was a most respected private banker, the financier of the Union cause in the Civil War and lately of the Northern Pacific Railroad.[6] At first, people were unwilling to admit the seriousness of the situation and tried frantically (so much so as to disclose their real fear) to keep business morale from faltering. The significance of Cooke's collapse, one editor tried to argue, was "less than that of a bad snow storm."[7]

But such pleas for sanity went unheeded as the Cooke failure was followed the next day by that of Fisk and Hatch, the financiers of the

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[6] Although the admiration of Cooke was very widespread, it should be noted that there was a small minority who dissented. One such daily was the Chicago Tribune which remarked that "Prudent businessmen have predicted for years that Jay Cooke & Co. would fail. Their enterprises were so daring, their scrupulousness so doubtful, their liabilities so large, their exterior so glittering. . . ." (Sept. 19, 1873). Even so the scattered criticism was never so strong as was directed at others like Drew and Vanderbilt.

[7] Boston Daily Advertiser, Sept. 23; see also New York World, Sept. 19; Chicago Tribune, Sept. 19; Philadelphia North American, Sept. 20; Cincinnati Commercial, Sept. 20; New York Herald, Sept. 25; New York Times, Sept. 19; Baltimore Morning Journal, Sept. 22; Washington Evening Star, Sept. 22.

Central Pacific and the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroads. That same day, Friday the 19th, also saw the failure of numerous smaller firms and runs on two New York banks, the Fourth National Bank and the Union Trust Company. These events were followed by such a flurry of frightened selling on Saturday that the New York Stock Exchange felt obliged to close its doors at eleven o'clock in the morning. It was not reopened until September 30.

Confidence was further shattered on Saturday by news of the failure of the Union Trust Company which was unable to withstand the pressure which had been placed upon it by the previous day's run. In the wake of this collapse it became known that it had largely resulted because Cornelius Vanderbilt, who had personal connections with some of the bank's officials, had been permitted to borrow $1.75 million which he needed to meet a dividend call on the Lake Shore Railroad. To further increase the suspicion, an audit disclosed that the bank's secretary had defaulted in the amount of $128,000.[8]

The banking crisis which ensued throughout New York City forced the bankers to pool their reserves and to use clearing house certificates to settle inter-bank differences. On September 24, New York banks effected a partial suspension of payments. This banking suspension spread in the next few days to the rest of the nation. By September 27 the suspension was complete with the exception of the West Coast which generally was financially separate from the rest of the country. It was the end of October before funds began to flow back into the banks.

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[8]For bitter criticism of Vanderbilt for his complicity in this failure see New York Times, Sept. 21, 23, 24; New York Tribune, Sept. 22.

In the meantime, a clamor arose for some sort of governmental activity to ease the crisis. President Ulyssess S. Grant and Secretary of the Treasury W. A. Richardson traveled to New York on Saturday, September 20, 1873, and met with financial leaders that evening and again on Sunday morning. These men, desperate for funds, requested that the Treasury reissue (by purchase of bonds) part of the $44 million "surplus" accumulated by McCulloch's contraction policy. Under business pressure, Grant and Richardson began to reissue greenbacks early in October and by mid-January had recommitted some $26 million to the economy, making a total of $382 million greenbacks in circulation.[9]

Congress returned in December, 1873, and began a long debate over inflation which culminated in the Inflation Bill of April 15, 1874. The bill provided for a $46 million increase in the national bank circulation and the reissue of the remaining $18 million greenbacks making a total now of $400 million. The Bill's advocates, generally Southern and Western delegates, argued that the additional funds were necessary due to the increased population and the growing demands of business and trade, and that such an inflationary step was necessary to break the cycle of the depression. The opponents of the Bill were generally either clergymen or reformers who believed that inflation was dishonest and immoral or Eastern financial interests who argued pragmatically that the initial release of funds immediately after the panic might have been beneficial, but that now, some seven months later, any additional increases would be harmful rather than helpful. What was needed more than anything, they argued was the assurance

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[9]For business requests for government aid see Unger, Greenback Era, 221; Philadelphia Inquirer, Sept. 19, 20, and 27; Commercial and Financial Chronicle, Sept. 20.

of stability offered by a solid dollar.[10]

The focal point of the controversy finally became President Grant as each side exerted pressure to sign or veto the Bill. After considerable equivocation, Grant vetoed the Bill on April 20, 1874. Grant's fortunes with the anti-inflationists reflected this wavering and then the final veto. Before Grant finally decided to veto the Bill, he was attacked alternately as a "Caesar," a laughable buffoon, or a pathetic fool, "foundering about with his staff and his Babcock" in a "helpless, hopeless way." After the veto, quite naturally, Grant once again became the national hero.[11]

The soft money interest once again passed inflationary measures in June, this time attached to the House Banking Bill. This Bill redistributed some $55 million in bank notes to the South and West, legitimitized Richardson's reissue of greenbacks by setting the greenback circulation at $382 million, and removed the reserve requirement for note circulation by banks. The Bill, essentially a compromise measure, directed as much at the Fall elections as at the country's finances, was approved by Grant on June 20, 1874. But after seven months of deliberation, the Bill was, as Irwin Unger has noted, "ludicrously trivial," and Congress adjourned, essentially having taken

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[10]For anti-inflation opinion see Unger, Greenback Era, 121; New York Tribune, Sept. 19; for an example of a business publication favoring and later opposing inflation on pragmatic grounds see the Commercial and Financial Chronicle which favored the release of up to $10 million greenbacks on Sept. 20, 1873, but later argued against the Inflation Bill (April 18, 1874, June 13 and June 27).

[11]Cincinnati Commercial, Oct. 27, 1873. See also Chicago Tribune, Sept. 30; Nation, Oct. 30; New York Herald, Sept. 27; New York World, Oct. 14 for other opinion on President Grant and the inflation issue.

no action to halt the plunging economy.[12]

While Congress was busy debating the obscurities of the financial question, the panic had turned into a depression. With the resumption of the banks about November 1, the panic proper was ended. The distress and economic chaos which followed in its wake were just beginning. The immediate result of the bank suspension in September had been the failure of some employers to meet their payrolls. Subsequently, in the first weeks of October, managers began to shorten work schedules or to lay off operatives. A more serious result from the long range view was the disruption of the domestic exchanges which resulted in serious cutbacks in production by the end of October. By the end of the year, there had been over 5,000 bankruptcies, amounting to some $228 million. These failures and the partial cutbacks by most other businesses led to widespread unemployment during the winter months. New York City, for example, had one-fourth of its work force unemployed.[13] All of which necessitated, and generally received, enlarged private and public charitable work.[14]

What interpretation did the American people place upon these events? How did they explain them and what action did they propose? Not all, of course, agreed on these matters, but we can see three broad categories into which we can place most of the people who thought about these questions in any sort of sophisticated manner at all.

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[12]Unger, Greenback Era, 246.

[13]Leah Hannah Feder, Unemployment Relief in Periods of Depression: A Study of Measures Adopted in Certain American Cities, 1857 through 1922 (N.Y.: Russell Sage, 1936), 39; Rezneck, "Distress, Relief, and Discontent," 498.

[14]Ibid.

The first such category of response to the panic is that of the conservative religious community. It was reflected in the church press and in certain "secular" periodicals such as Scribner's or Harper's Weekly which maintained a rather close affinity to the clerical views. Since a larger portion of this paper deals with this interpretation in depth, we need only mention it briefly here. The key to this view, which we can style conservative (orthodox) moralism or pietistic moralism, is its assigning of transcendental significance to the panic. Briefly, they believed that the social crisis was the result of sin against God. The panic had, therefore, come from God either directly by his intervention or indirectly by the workings of his system. But in either case the interpretation was theocentric and there was a feeling of a guiding presence or power behind the crash with which man had to deal. There was the feeling that there was a purpose and a meaning for man in the crisis. "Why" the panic occurred, therefore, was more important than "how" it occurred. And the answer to the question "why" was always written in terms of pietistic failures. In this context, the remedies suggested also took on a transcendental meaning. The solution was basically a call for religious revival which they believed would result in a more socially responsible person and ultimately an end to the crisis.

A second viewpoint--this the most common in the daily press and business journals--was really the direct opposite. This interpretation, which we can call "technical" or "autonomous," viewed the panic in purely phenomenal terms and denied that it held any moral or transcendental significance. Since this view is basically secular it will not be discussed at any great length in this paper which is primarily

devoted to a discussion of the clerical interpretations. It should, however, be outlined here in general form for the purpose of contrast. The men who looked at the panic in these terms were concerned not so much with the transcendental question of "why" the panic occurred, but merely with the phenomenal or technical question of "how" the panic occurred. They were confident that an understanding of how panics occurred could in itself suggest sufficient remedies for the problem. "Reflection and a careful calculation of the effects," one editor wrote, was the proper way out.[15]

The adherents of this technical view were quite explicit in their denial of any transcendental significance to the panic. As the editor of the Baltimore Sun wrote, "it is part . . . of the inexorable logic of events--the natural outcome of a state of things which has been going on almost unchecked for years."[16] They saw no power or necessary purpose hidden in it. "A community," one argued, " is the architect of its own fortunes."[17] Above all, they believed, this was not the time for irrelevant moralizing. The editor of the New York Times wrote that "the great thing now is not to point out a moral, but to avert, if possible, a continuance of the misfortune of the past two days."[18] Of course, the conservative clergy would have argued that pointing out a moral was the first and only way to achieve a return to prosperity.

The secular community, however, denying the moral interpretation

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[15]Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 21.

[16]Baltimore Sun, Sept. 20.

[17]North American, Sept. 24.

[18]New York Times, Sept. 19, 20.

of the crisis, sought purely human solutions. Having concentrated on the technical question of how the panic occurred, they sought first for flaws in the economic system which could be remedied. The Commercial and Financial Chronicle was not seeking a solution in terms of increased religious dedication but in terms of increased capital, currency, and confidence.[19] The Philadelphia Press was urging that since these panics seemed to arise so often that the country should look for the establishment of "great windbreaks" to temper their violence.[20] The Richmond Daily Dispatch agreed that there must be something "incomplete" in "the system." What the nation needed was the aid of "a controlling institution with great financial powers" which would act as a "balance wheel" in the economy.[21] And, significantly, while church leaders sought salvation in their context of piety, the daily press spoke of the "saving virtue of common sense."[22]

The two groups even used a different vocabulary. Those who saw the panic in technical terms talked not of "moral" and "immoral" actions but of "wise" and "unwise" or "legal" and "illegal" or "practical" and "impractical."[23] And, because they saw no transcendental power behind the crash, they had no concept of ultimate benefits coming from it. Where the orthodox clergy saw the panic as the first step toward a religious reawakening, the secular community saw only distress and

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[19]Commercial and Financial Chronicle, Apr. 11, 1874.

[20]Philadelphia Press, Sept. 22.

[21]Richmond Daily Dispatch, Sept. 27, 29.

[22]North American, Sept. 24.

[23]See for instance the issues of Railroad Gazette or the Commercial and Financial Chronicle for examples of this.

financial loss.[24] And, quite logically, when the business community did speak of hopeful signs it was in terms of government purchase of bonds, of banks resuming, of the successful operation of the clearing house, and not in the clerical terms of pietistic contrition and a change of heart.[25]

Quite understandably, each thought the other group was working in the wrong direction. The orthodox clergy accused the businessmen of materialism, and they in turn were accused of wasting time with moral platitudes when there was real work to be done. A Richmond paper, for instance, complained of

> the old rut generally followed by elderly people in commenting upon financial crises--viz., that extravagance is at the bottom of financial pressure; that people are living too fast, and eating up their substance by fine dressing, luxurious eating, and fast horses. Such speculations are gratifying to men of plain habits, old-fashioned notions, and wayward constitutional principles. Dear old fellows. They are most excellent people; but they hurry to conclusions guided by prejudice more than by enlightened judgment. 26

But, of course, such attacks were a bit unfair to the conservatives because once one grants their theocentric world-view, then morality is not irrelevant. Rather piety was the indispensible prerequisite for reform, and in fact, the guarantee of it.

There is yet a third interpretation which we must consider. This was held by a small group of younger, more liberal churchmen and some secular magazines like the Nation which shared these views.

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[24]See for example the year end report, Railroad Gazette, Dec. 27, 1873, for an example of this pessimism.

[25]See for instance New York World, Sept. 23.

[26]Richmond Daily Dispatch, Oct. 8.

This interpretation, which we shall call liberal or reform moralism, was, in a sense, a synthesis of the previous two views we have discussed. It is the most difficult to identify in the 1870's since it was only in an embryonic stage. But it is perhaps the most important since it led to the social gospel.

As we have just seen, the conservative clergy were charged by their secular opponents with irrelevancy because of their stress upon morality and their apparent inability or unwillingness to participate in a technical analysis of the crisis. What these younger theologians were attempting to do was to retain the moral orientation of the orthodox, but to enlarge their position to allow participation of the technical level as well.

It must be cautioned, however, that the difference between the orthodox and the liberal moral interpretations was not a question of activity per se. The conservatives had always seen social responsibility as a part of piety and under this they engaged in a vast amount of charitable work. And so, as long as the panic continued, they participated in a marked degree in the charitable work necessitated by the distress. But, since they believed that the panic had a transcendental purpose and that it was working toward an ultimate good and that when and only when this was accomplished, the panic would be gone, they were not particularly interested in schemes to hasten its departure. And so, as long as the crisis continued they would dispense charity, but tampering with banking laws, currency requirements, legislative restrictions on business activity and transactions were beyond their concern, unless it was to discourage them. It was not that they were deaf to cries for reform, but rather that their theocentric interpreta-

tion of the crisis made true reform only possible through a religious reawakening. It was simply the standard distinction between the clerical and secular theories of reform.[27]

But unlike their older orthodox colleagues, the liberal clergy treated the panic not as a religious or spiritual crisis but first and foremost as an economic crisis. In their discussion of the panic they, like the secular commentators, were less interested in "why" the panic occurred than in "how" it had occurred. They interested themselves in the financial mechanism per se, questioning its validity and seeking for ways for reforming it. There were areas to which the activity of the orthodox was not particularly oriented. But because the liberals did not seek to interpret the panic in transcendental terms, they could participate in the technical analysis of its causes.

On the other hand, the liberals' interpretation was slightly different from the secular since they did still retain a moral dimension in the religious zeal and religious criteria of justice which they carried into their technical analysis. Thus their attempts at reform had a moral flavor which distinguished them from those of the autonomous secularist. Thus they were really giving a religious significance to the worldly work in which they engaged.

With these categories in mind, let us then turn to a more detailed account of the verbal response of the churches to the Panic of 1873. We will first detail the conservative theological response and then the theological premises which supported it. Next we will turn our attention to the intellectual process by which the liberal

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[27]This distinction is admirably discussed in Arthur Ekirch, The Idea of Progress in America, 1815-1860 (N.Y.: Columbia, 1944).

synthesis grew out of the opposition of conservatism and positivist secularism. Finally, we will examine the liberal response to the panic and the struggle between the two opposing church views.

THE SEVERITY OF THE PANIC

The conservative theologians' appraisal of the severity of the panic went through two distinct phases. First, during the early weeks of the financial crisis which was eventually to extend from 1873 to 1879, the American church press displayed a cautious optimism. To a large extent this attitude was merely a reflection of the pronouncements of the business community itself as it tried to restore a minimum of confidence in the market. As such this somewhat restrained optimism lasted from the first collapse of September to about the end of October.

The early optimism fostered by the commercial press was supported in the minds of the church leaders by two factors. First, they believed that the basic economic condition of the country was sound, and second, that the panic would be confined to a small, speculative fringe of the business community. It was a speculative panic, they assured themselves, coming in the midst of good times. It was as sudden and as unexpected as an "earthquake shock" or "one of those cyclones of which we read in the Eastern seas."[1] Its unexpectedness lent strong support to the argument that the panic was but a minor quirk in the business cycle, that it was no real long range threat. After all, production was still up, foreign commerce was good (in fact, the balance of payments was favorable for the first time since the end of specie payments), and the mercantile interests of the nation were in better shape than they had been since the end of the war.[2]

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[1] Independent, Sept. 25; Evangelist, Sept. 25; Christian Advocate (Nashville), Sept. 25.

[2] Evangelist, Nov. 11; Christian Advocate, Sept. 25; New York Observer, Sept. 25.

Most encouraging was the fact that the fall harvests were very good. These were, in the opinion of many, the real test of American prosperity, and above all in this case, they were wealth "which the bulls and bears of Wall Street could not devour."[3] "The fields groan under the golden harvest;" certainly there was no cause for any great alarm.[4]

The feeling that the basic economic condition of the country was sound went arm-in-arm with the contention that only a small group of speculators would be affected by the collapse. Certainly, they argued, there could be no harm to the "substantial business" of the country. There might be some slackening of interest in rails, but all the rest was as "safe as in the best of times."[5]

In fact, under such circumstances it could well be argued, as it frequently was, that the panic would actually help legitimate business by clearing away the unwholesome speculators. If these stock-jobbers ventured "out beyond their depth . . . it is just that such unwisdom and folly should suffer."[6] If these speculators, who, after all, had caused this unsettled stock picture, are "killed by the storm the country will have reason to rejoice over it."[7]

"Indeed," as one Methodist editor wrote only a week after Cooke's

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[3]Christian Observer, Nov. 11.

[4]Religious Herald, Nov. 16; New York Observer, Sept. 25; Christian Advocate, Sept. 25.

[5]New York Observer, Sept. 25; Christian Advocate (Nashville), Sept. 27; Louisville Catholic Advocate, Sept. 25, Oct. 2; Herald and Presbyter, Sept. 25; Advance, Sept. 25.

[6]Lutheran and Missionary, Nov. 27.

[7]Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 2.

collapse, "not withstanding the panic, the encouraging hope prevails that the great disturbance of the week will leave an increased assurance of a prosperous future."[8] Certainly during the last week of September, most editors were inclined to agree that "there is no need for alarm; on the contrary, everything is hopeful for the future."[9] At the very least, they could judge that the "financial outlook is by no means discouraging."[10] From all corners of the country came similarly optimistic reports. Boston's Catholic paper declared that the trouble was completely over by the middle of October. A Presbyterian in Chicago felt that his city had also survived the worst by that time and in Richmond the church press was rejoicing over the end of the "stocking and oyster-can banks" and felt that since the minor financial excitement had passed, it was now time to turn serious attention to a real worry, the spread of yellow fever in the Mississippi Valley.[11]

But the attitude of the religious press was not a unanimous echo of the secular optimism of the early weeks after the crash. From the very beginning, they were somewhat more restrained and cautious in their optimism than their fellow journalists in the daily press. They were somewhat wary that a search would reveal a moral basis for the panic. If so, then the lack of confidence was not purely illusory. If indeed it were found that the fear was based in real moral weakness, albeit a temporarily hidden one, then it was almost certain that nothing could stop the deluge: "it will flow until it has swept every-

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[8] Christian Advocate, Sept. 25.

[9] Presbyterian Banner, Oct. 1.

[10] Presbyterian, Oct. 4.

[11] Pilot, Oct. 9; Interior, Oct. 9; Christian Observer, Oct. 15.

thing which is founded upon the sand to common ruin."[12]

Moralists that they were, the conservatives found the greatest cause for pessimism in the lack of solid moral character in society. Many looked back to the Panic of 1857 for any comparison which they might find helpful in 1873. To those who did, the lessons they gathered were not encouraging because in 1857, the "first light that broke upon the chaos was in the people's turning unto God."[13] But in 1873, they saw no such evidence and men like Theodore Cuyler of Brooklyn, were soon convinced that this was "more than a transient panic." In mid-October, when many secular dailies were rejoicing in the return of stability, a definitely prophetic and pessimistic theme was also present and running along side of any optimism in the church press. This was especially true in the Catholic press, which in any case was rather quick to question the prevailing adoration of big business. The business community was as unprepared for the panic according to one Catholic editor as "it is for the Day of Judgment."[14] It was simply idiotic to see the panic as a temporary phenomenon, warned another; "the idea is both absurd and illusory."[15] The daily press might be frightened into saying that the panic was over, but the New York Freeman's Journal was having none of it. The situation did not look at all sound to them. Their motto was "Stand from under!"[16]

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[12] New York Observer, Sept. 25; Religious Herald, Oct. 2.

[13] Presbyterian, Oct. 4.

[14] Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 2.

[15] Pittsburgh Catholic, Oct. 4.

[16] New York Freeman's Journal, Sept. 27.

By November, it had become quite apparent that the optimistic predictions of the early days after the crash had simply not been born out by events. Thus a second phase in the churchmen's appraisal of the severity of the crash set in. The crisis simply had not disappeared and there was "little, if any, improvement in the financial situation," as one Cincinnati paper remarked. "Many well-informed persons hold that the worst is to come."[17] The Boston Pilot, one Catholic paper which tended to accept the early flurry of confidence, tried to appear certain in its assurances that "the cloud must soon blow off," but quite plainly the financial weather was not clearing.[18] Other papers, like the Congregational organ in Chicago, were finally forced to admit that the "clouds which seemed to be breaking away ten days ago have closed in again."[19] From this point on the prophetic note dominated in the expressions of the church press and what optimism still existed was transferred into spiritual rather than financial terms. It is from this point on that their unique moral view of the crisis became dominant.

The churchmen's acceptance of the severity of the panic was further increased as the financial pressure spread from speculative to mercantile interests and then to industrial concerns. From this came increasing reports of cutbacks in employment. With the coldest November in half a century setting in, the tone became increasingly somber and the press began to accept the pessimistic appraisal that

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[17] Herald and Presbyter, Nov. 13.

[18] Pilot, Nov. 18.

[19] Advance, Nov. 6.

"the prospects of the approaching winter are not pleasant to contemplate."[20] The "Dull Season" or "Hard Times" had set in and a typical report from Boston was that all classes feared that the winter would be a bad one.[21]

With this revised estimate of the actual financial conditions came an increasingly gloomy prophetic note. The Methodist journal in Cincinnati was very downcast. The more its editor surveyed the financial picture, the more he was convinced that there was "seed enough for an interminable harvest of panics and financial revulsions."[22] "Worse still," he continued, "no bottom is found on which to build for the future. All is quicksand, and the stream of delusions is whirling it no one knowns into what eddies and whirlpools of confusion."[23]

Of course, as the crisis lengthened, the work of the church itself became impaired, a fact which tended to foster a still more sober appraisal of the severity of the panic. This was especially so because one of the first religious activities to be hurt was the church press itself. The weeklies began to run regular notices first asking, then pleading, and finally threatening subscribers for the payment of their fees. Many editors had to deal not only with overdue payments but with cancelled subscriptions. The Presbyterian, like many of its fellow newspapers, found all too many people ignoring what it called all the urgings of "Intelligence, Benevolence, Spiritual Wisdom,

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[20] Evangelist, Nov. 6.

[21] Pilot, Oct. 25; for similar fears see Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 30; Christian Observer, Oct. 29; Evangelist, Nov. 6; Lutheran Standard, Nov. 3.

[22] Western Christian Advocate, Nov. 26.

[23] Ibid.

Personal Piety & Conscience," succumbing to the temptations of "Selfishness and Economy" and crying "Stop My Paper."[24]

The press was not alone in feeling the pinch from dinimished church benevolence. Almost all church benevolent boards and their staffs were required to tighten their accounts. In Philadelphia, the building of a new Episcopal Divinity School was delayed for two years due to a shortage of funds.[25] The German Reformed Church reported that some of its seminarians were forced to drop out of classes because of the stringency.[26] The Lutheran Standard complained that the "present sad financial condition of our country has a bearing upon the church's work which is deplorable."[27] Many of the Presbyterian boards reported that they had only the choices of retrenchment or debt.[28] The Methodists reported a decrease in funds for missionary work and pleaded with their brethern to continue to meet their pledges.[29]

The churches were naturally displeased with the situation and made no attempt to hide their chagrin. Many had suspected that there would be a decrease immediately after the panic and had cautioned their members that financial distress was no excuse for a retrenchment

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[24]Presbyterian, Nov. 18; see also Herald and Presbyter, Dec. 11; Central Presbyterian, Dec. 24; Christian, Dec., 1873; Lutheran Observer, Nov. 7; Lutheran Standard, Nov. 29; Reformed Church Messenger, Oct. 29; Christian Advocate, Oct. 9; Presbyterian Banner, Nov. 26.

[25]Raymond R. Taylor, "A Century of the Philadelphia Divinity School," Hist. Mag. Prot. Episc. Church, XXVI (Sept., 1957), 208.

[26]Harry M. J. Klein, History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (Lancaster, Pa.: Eastern Synod, 1943), 283.

[27]Lutheran Standard, Nov. 22.

[28]Presbyterian Monthly Review, passim.

[29]Christian Advocate (Nashville), Feb. 7, 1874.

of their religious giving. In fact, urged the Central Presbyterian, why not give an extra thank offering in appreciation of the fact that all was not taken away.[30] There was a suspicion, probably well founded, that many were using the Panic as an excuse to escape church commitments.[31] This, to the church leaders, was inexcusable. If anything, God "ought to have been the preferred creditor, because he furnished all the capital."[32] Much of the blame in this matter was placed squarely upon the parish clergy who were accused of shirking their duty. There was simply no excuse for the diminished collections; the people should arouse themselves from their past "sloth and gather the Lord's money from his people."[33]

The situation no doubt seemed all the more severe because the same crisis which was causing a decrease in church income was also requiring increased charitable expenditures on the part of the churches. The Board of Church Erection of the Northern Presbyterian Church, for instance,--it extended aid to those congregations in the process of building new facilities--received numerous pleas of which this letter is typical:

> I know these are trying times with the rich as well as the poor; but can they not do something to help us? We have given all the money we have, nay more, we have borrowed money at fifteen and even twenty per cent. interest, and now we have come to a stand. If we cannot get relief, our building, nearly completed, must be sold. Could we have anticipated

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[30]Central Presbyterian, Dec. 24.

[31]Christian World, Oct. 2; Presbyterian, Sept. 28.

[32]Presbyterian, Nov. 1.

[33]Central Presbyterian, Nov. 12.

> this financial crisis, we would not have undertaken to build; but now we are in for it, and how we are to get through we know not. 34

These pleas multiplied in nearly every domestic board of the church. Especially hard hit were those agencies which subsidized small or newly organized congregations or which were involved in the provision of pensions for retired clergymen. Typical of the laments which poured into the offices of the Northern Presbyterian Church was this plea from a New Jersey clergyman who sorely missed his allowance:

> I have been compelled to supplement this deficit by borrowing at ten per cent. at the banks. This is hard sailing for an old man. . . . I can't raise a dollar. But then I am at the Master's work and content therewith. "The Lord reigns." 35

As the summer waned, these letters from poorly-paid ministers became more urgent and the closing phrases shifted from the stoic optimism seen above to an occasional bitterness such as "Sick, suffering, and sorrowing, I am fraternally yours."[36] The Presbyterian national organization tried to fill as many of these requests as possible but many times had to merely counsel patience and explain that it also felt the effects of the "universal stagnation and stringency caused by the late widespread financial panic."[37]

Thus, as we have seen, the initial attitude of the church press toward the financial crisis of September 18, 1873, was one of cautious

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[34] Presbyterian Monthly Review, XXV (Feb., 1874), 56.

[35] Ibid., XXV (Sept., 1874), 265.

[36] Ibid., XXV (Nov., 1874), 329-330.

[37] Ibid., XXV (Aug., 1874), 255.

optimism. But as the expected recovery did not come, and as the depression began to paralyze the normal work of the church, the facile optimism faded and the caution of October grew increasingly into a tight-lipped awareness of the distress.

THE CAUSES OF THE PANIC

The basic feature of the conservative interpretation of the panic was, as we noted earlier, their moral or theocentric view, i.e., their assigning of transcendental significance to the economic catastrophe. This naturally gave a distinct religious slant to their discussion of the source of the panic. Implicit in their discussion was the belief that, at least in a general sense, God controlled and spoke to man through the economic life of the community. Whether they saw this particular panic as the natural result of man's sin within God's pre-established order or whether they saw it as an instance of special providence, there was inherent in their analysis a feeling, however, vague, of divine presence and purpose behind the crash. There was also the belief that it contained a moral lesson or message. In any case, the weight of their interpretation of the "causes" of the panic fell upon a search for this message. It mattered not so much what the technical means were as it did what was the transcendental connotation placed upon them. The technical was only important to the degree that it gave a clue to the ultimate. In this sense they were not so much intent on merely "explaining" the panic as they were upon "interpreting" it. It was as one editor said--and this could well be taken as the theme for them all--, "Times have their events, and these are not only the signs of the being of God, but also of his activity." What then was to be their task? Surely it was to "discern and understand the signs of the time;" it was to search for the religious significance inherent in the financial distress.[1]

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[1]Christian World, Oct. 9.

Most of the churchmen believed that the key to the understanding of the purpose and the essence of the message of the crash lay in the financial and business activities of the nation. Quite naturally, they reasoned, since the catastrophe had come in a financial form, the moral flaws to which it was related must be centered in that aspect of man's life. Other clergymen believed that the purpose of the panic extended beyond the financial world. They saw the problem of the panic lying either in the immorality of men in their individual lives or perhpas in the immorality of the society or the government. But whatever the message one should draw from it, the significant point is that all the interpretations were theocentric. The panic was only meaningful in terms of man's relations to God and his moral obligations.

Quite naturally, since Jay Cooke and Fisk and Hatch, whose collapses had triggered the panic, were both involved in railroad financing, it was to the railroads that churchmen first looked for sufficient moral flaws to have caused a panic. They were quick to note that there were certain real moral weaknesses in this sector of the economy. The Christian Mirror, a Congregational weekly in Portland, Maine, saw that the greatest lapses in American morality were no longer found in rings and municipal bosses, but in the great railroad corporations.[2] The railroads had been infected with a craze for fast money, noted the Presbyterian, and a distaste for the honest "drudgery of regular business;" they had put "success above right."[3]

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[2]Christian Mirror, Oct. 21.

[3]Presbyterian, Sept. 27.

Almost everyone noticed that the rails had been over-expanded.[4] Lyman Atwater, editor of the Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review and also professor of economics (or moral and political economy as it was then called) at Princeton, argued that high war profits and dividends had spurred overconstruction which had then lowered profits and dividends lessening the market for the type of bonds which Jay Cooke was selling. He was certain that even without the panic these factors would have causes a general tapering off of railroad financing. But railroad financiers had not only gone beyond the limits of fiscal sanity; they had also transgressed the boundaries of morality. The overconstruction had been financed by bonds, and then more bonds had been issued to pay the interest on the first bonds. In this fashion, financing had become speculation and speculation had become pure gambling, and all of this with other people's money. This "tisking of the property of others" was not only "perilous" but also "immoral."[5]

Thus in Atwater's opinion, the whole shaky structure of railroading had become "so variously and obviously implicated with morality and religion" that one could not avoid seeing, at least figuratively, the hand of God in the collapse.[6] Worse still, Atwater noted,

> if anything was wanting to fan the flame to the last degree of fury, it was the evidence, growing more and more cumulative for years, of widespread demoralization, fraud and theft among those holding the highest fiduciary positions involving the custody and handling of money belonging to the nation, states, counties, and other municipalities, in our great banking and

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[4]See Advance, Oct. 2; Christian Advocate, Sept. 25; Illustrated Christian Weekly, Oct. 11; New York Observer, Nov. 27.

[5]Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review, III (Jan., 1874), 100-107; also New York Observer, Sept. 25.

[6]Ibid., 100.

railway corporations, and in more private trusts. 7

Some were less polite than Atwater in citing the actions of businessmen as ample cause for the panic. The Catholic weekly in Philadelphia charged that railroads had been engaged in a "systematic plundering for at least a decade of years." Their whole story was one of "rotten Credit Mobilier institutions, millions advanced on railroads running through swamps, supported by greenbacks, and whose destination was God knows where."[8] And now the nation was being called back not only to sanity from its unsound business practices, but also to piety from its distinctly unchristian business ethics.

In assigning the cause of the panic to the immorality of the business community, all were exceedingly careful to distinguish between speculators and honest businessmen. They clearly recognized that there was a "regular traffic in stocks and bonds which may be honestly done for a commission." For these men no praise could be too great. "Consecrated business life is one the great needs of the church. The business man is really the prince of our times."[9]

On the other hand, for the speculators who made money from the gambling and the risking of the hard and honestly earned savings of the poor in "reackless and visionary schemes," they had little but contempt.

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[7]Ibid., 100, 105.

[8]Catholic Herald, Oct. 4.

[9]New York Observer, Oct. 2; Central Presbyterian, July, 8, 1874; This dichotomy was also prevalent among many businessmen themselves. See Edward C. Kirkland, Dream and Thought in the Business Community (Ithaca: Cornell, 1956), 1-28, and Business in the Gilded Age: The Conservatives' Balance Sheet (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1952), 50 for evidence and examples of this type of thought among key business leaders.

Speculation was simply gambling in a more subtle form. If these men lost money in the panic, it "was precisely of the same sort as when money is staked at the gaming table and lost."[10] Such speculative activity was not only demoralized but also demoralizing. Like strong drink one could become addicted and sink still lower. "Honor, social and domestic ties, property, reputation, moral honesty, everything valuable to man, goes down under the unappeased appetite thus created, and in the inevitable exigencies that attend a gambler's life."[11] If anything, the Lutheran Standard was amazed that these gamblers had gotten away with it as long as they had. "Is it not a little singular," it asked, "that in a 'Christian country' men can be wholesale gamblers and still maintain a respectable standing in the community and even in the church?"[12]

It was to this dishonesty within the business community that many attributed the reason for the crash.[13] And if business felt the brunt of the catastrophe, many churchmen were more eager to rejoice than to extend sympathy. The monthly journal of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, a small, extremely conservative Calvinistic group, assailed these "Mammon worshippers" in vicious jeremiads:

> When stock gambling, the curse of Wall Street, is greatly crippled, good men say, "God be praised." We sympathize with the poor who are robbed of their all, but we confess no tender regret so far as those wicked millionaires are concerned.

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[10] Lutheran Standard, Oct. 4.

[11] Zion's Herald, Sept. 25.

[12] Lutheran Standard, Oct. 4.

[13] See for instance, Central Presbyterian, Jan. 2, 1874; Brownson's Quarterly Review, III (Jan., 1874), 124; Pilot, Sept. 27, Oct. 4.

> Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the laborers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept bad by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 14

But, of course, it was easier to make a distinction between "speculators" and "legitimate" businessmen in theory than in practice. It was quite apparent to all of the editors, as it was to Samuel Mease of the German Reformed Church's Christian World, that "we should not be over-hasty in condemning commercial men. There may be honest as well as dishonest failures."[15]

When it came to specific cases of business failure, therefore, the clergy were not so prone to rejoice that ruin had fallen upon the heads of sinners. The first reaction of almost all the editors outside the South to the Cooke collapse, for example, was to express their sympathy and regret for the demise of the man they still viewed as the heroic financier of the Union cause in the Civil War. The Advance of Chicago averred that Cooke "has had a genuine business genius for making money, and a true Christian genius for using it."[16] The Herald and Presbyter likewise attested that he was widely known for his "benevolence and rectitude."[17]

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[14]Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, XII (Jan., 1874), 76-77.

[15]Christian World, Oct. 2.

[16]Advance, Sept. 25,

[17]Herald and Presbyter, Sept. 25.

But if the church acquited Cooke of grievous sin, how then did it explain his complicity in the panic? Many held to a type of conspiracy theory in which Cooke was the unerring victim. There was, they asserted, a plot afoot by certain "lawyers" to break down the credit of the Western rails.[18] This attack had come partially out of the Credit Mobilier scandal which many believed was now being used as an excuse to attack all the rails. No one was, of course, defending the Credit Mobilier, but they were wary that even well intentioned men might ruin the whole railroad business in an attempt to root out the corruption. This certainly was not just. As the New York Observer reasoned, before the panic, if the Union Pacific "was robbed by its builders, that is no reason the lawyers should rob it now."[19]

But the Cooke affair ran much deeper than this. Many of the church papers, such as the Churchman and the Herald and Presbyter, had carried Cooke's advertisements for bond issues on the Northern Pacific Railroad. They had thereby, at least tangentially in the opinion of many, implicated themselves if they charged Cooke with any gross violations of business ethics. In fact, the conservative press was under attack from some of the daily press and some of the liberal church papers for this very failing.

The leader of the attempt to implicate the church press with the Cooke failure was Murat Halstead (1824-1908), editor of the Cincinnati Commercial. Halstead was liberal theologically, often defending pro-

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[18] See Rocky Mountain Presbyterian, Sept., 1873; New York Observer, Aug. 21.

[19] New York Observer, Aug. 21; also Christian World, Sept. 20; Lutheran Standard, Jan. 1, 1874.

gressive churchmen (especially Henry Ward Beecher) in his editorial columns. In the summer of 1873, he became suspicious that the Cooke financed Northern Pacific was not as promising as an investment as it was advertised as being.. He sent Redfield, one of his top reporters, out to the Northern plains to inspect the route of the road firsthand. Upon his return, he was then to write a series of articles evaluating the actual condition of the venture. Redfield's report turned out to be a scathing indictment of both the railway itself and the advertising methods of the Cooke firm. The Northern Pacific was in actuality, Redfield charged, a "prima facie case of humbug;" it was nothing but a sinkhole for funds being run out across an "icy desert." Moreover, Cooke had been dishonest and the churchmen who ran his ads, especially those printed in such a fashion as to be indistinguishable from normal editorials, were equally guilty and responsible for the hoax. "Newspapers professing to be religious seem singularly careless, or they are unusually crafty," charged the Commercial, "in consenting to be occupied with 'reading matter' about the leading quakeries of the day."[20]

The conservative press remained adamant, however, in their defense of Cooke, largely, one suspects, because Cooke really had fulfilled the external requirements of the pietistic creed. To T. Dewitt Talmadge, the conservative Brooklyn evangelist, the lesson that could best be learned from the Cooke failure was the insecurity of worldly wealth. How wise, he asserted, Cooke had been to store up for himself treasure in heaven upon which he could rely now that his earthly treasures were gone. Now the rest of the world could learn and practice

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[20]Cincinnati Commercial, Oct. 2 to Oct. 7; also Nation, Sept., 1873.

the lesson of sympathy toward a fellow Christian who was in trouble. Talmadge, for one, was not going to desert Cooke because, "when the world cries out against a man who loves God and serves Him, I like to cry out in his behalf."[21]

But the good will toward Cooke, which grew, at least partially out of the memory of his services to the Union during the late war, did not necessarily extend to other businessmen who were caught in the financial whirlwind. Fisk and Hatch, although praised by a few, were more often accused of having "gone widely into stocks."[22] The most vicious personal attacks came upon Cornelius Vanderbilt because of his implication in the failure of the Brooklyn Trust Company. The Interior of Chicago was glad, even gleeful, to see Vanderbilt lose money as a result of his own greed.[23]

Some of the weeklies went so far as to charge that the over-expansion of rails and the monetary stringency had been deliberately planned by what the Christian Intelligencer and the Herald and Presbyter called a "combination of unscrupulous men who are constantly plotting against the public welfare."[24] Boston's Methodist paper decided that a "strong party" had attempted to "bull the market" by keeping the price of gold up. This had been feasible in the fall months due to the natural gold drain to the West for the crop movements. The resultant shortage in the East was then the cause of

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[21]Sermon of Sept. 18, reprinted in New York Herald, Sept. 20.

[22]Herald and Presbyter, Sept. 25.

[23]Interior, Oct. 23.

[24]Herald and Presbyter, Oct. 2, quoting Christian Intelligencer.

Cooke's inability to sell his bonds and his failure.[25] The Philadelphia Catholic Herald agreed that there had been foul play and charged the panic to deliberate "criminal speculation" on the part of certain bankers.[26] Now if the roof collapsed upon the heads of these rogues, it was not a time for sorrow but for rejoicing.

As long as they were convinced that the moral failing was confined to only a small speculative section of the economy, then the spread of the panic throughout the market as a whole was seen as utterly senseless. Certainly, admitted the Methodist, a few rails were overextended and some speculators had been dishonest, but that was no reason for a total collapse.[27] A Baptist paper remarked that "never was there so great a trouble from so slight a cause. It is very properly termed a panic."[28] It was "blind and senseless," said the Evangelist, "a mad terror, in which men lose their reason, and trample each other down like a herd of buffaloes."[29] When would the whole matter end? "Just when men cease to be frightened. There is no occasion for this wild terror."[30]

But, as we noted in the previous chapter, the expected confidence never came. Instead, the fear increased. When this trend became evi-

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[25]Zion's Herald, Oct. 2.

[26]Catholic Herald, Nov. 15. For a similar "devil theory" in the labor press, see Herbert George Gutman, "Social and Economic Structure and Depression: American Labor in 1873 and 1874," (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1959), 22-23.

[27]Methodist, Sept. 27.

[28]Religious Herald, Nov. 20.

[29]Evangelist, Sept. 25; Other examples see New York Observer, Oct. 9; Presbyterian Monthly Review, XXV (Jan., 1874), 1; Interior, Oct. 2; Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 2.

[30]Evangelist, Sept. 25.

dent in October, the churchmen had to reassess their analysis of the causation of the crash as well as their evaluation of its severity. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that because they now recognized the severity of the panic they were forced to reassess their ideas concerning its source. That is, if the panic was not to be confined to a small speculative fringe but rather was to spread to the entire society, then was not the moral evil of railroad speculation inadequate to explain the crisis? At least so they reasoned. Speculation would lead to the demise of speculators, and justly so, but widespread distress was meant to point to deeper and more pervasive moral failures in society. There was, then a shift in tone proportionate to their reevaluation of the severity of the panic noted in the previous chapter.

But this shift in attitude meant more than a widening of the search for moral flaws from the business community to the society as a whole. It also meant a broadening of their interpretation of the divine purpose which they saw behind the panic. All of which heightened the transcendental implications of the panic for them. Now even the fear which they had once seen as senseless was given a religious connotation. As one editor wrote, "Fear is the consequence of guilt somewhere,"[31] On second glance, many like the Methodist, began to see the presence of "some great and growing evils."[32] The panic was not "a phantom," wrote one Catholic editor. Everywhere he looked, he saw "a deeply rooted feeling of distrust pervading every portion of the

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[31]Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, XII (Jan. 1874), 6.

[32]Methodist, Oct. 4.

community."[33]

And this feeling could not occur without a widespread sense, or at least a suspicion, of sin. As the Episcopalian Churchman reasoned, "We do not believe a financial panic can take place without something morally wrong which has been widely pervading the community." And it had to go much deeper than the financial community if they were to account for so great a crisis. As the Churchman continued, "It goes much deeper, and proves a widespread want of faith in God. As men are in their relations to God, so are they in their relations to one another."[34] This new line of reasoning was best expressed by the Methodist in the following manner:

> Had this been a panic merely, it would have been gone nearly as quickly as it came. The nation would have rallied and laughed. When shall we learn that plainest of all laws in the universe--that every effect must have not only a cause but an adequate cause? When shall we hear the voice of God speaking from the whirlwinds, and take to heart the lessons he would teach? 35

So, as this passage suggests, the very depths of the panic forced the churchmen to look for a broader, more adequate explanation of the crash, both in terms of the moral flaws necessary to create it and the message or purpose which it supposedly carried. For almost all, there was now "something ominous as well as startling in this sudden collapse of all business. It could not be unless the roots of evil that wrought their failure had taken wide and deep hold of the

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[33]Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 2.

[34]Churchman, Oct. 4, Oct. 15.

[35]Methodist, Jan. 17, 1874.

national heart."[36] For some, the very depths of the crash suggested that it was more than the ordinary working out of God's justice. A tragedy of this order suggested something of divine judgment, or special wrath. This tendency toward an Old Testament prophetic view was especially strong among the conservative Calvinists. As one reasoned, "there is a lamentable prevalence of wickedness in our land, who does not know? And what professing Christian does not weep to think of the judgments to which the nation is exposed because of wickedness in places high and low?"[37]

The most widespread intimations of the panic as a special providence of God were, however, connected not so much to thoughts of punishment as to thoughts of a season of religious revival. This, in fact, was, as we shall see in more detail later, a widely spread explanation of the reason or purpose behind the crash. The view was strengthened by frequent reference to the Panic of 1857 when economic crisis had indeed been followed by a period of revival. If this had happened once, was it too much to expect it again? Perhaps that could be the underlying explanation of the cause of the panic.[38]

Certainly as they looked about there was a vast amount of evil in the land which could either explain the crash itself or serve as ample reason for the instigation of a season of revival. And, inevitably, it was to this that the editors always returned. The Christian Intelligencer called this failing a lack of "real, practical working

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[36]Catholic World, XVIII (Jan., 1874), 559.

[37]Associate Presbyterian, XV (Oct., 1873), 154.

[38]Advance, Oct. 3; Presbyterian, Oct. 4.

piety."[39] Another editor referred to it as a failure to submit to the claims of charity since "only perfect love casteth out fear." Another spoke of the "failure to adher to the code of morals incorporated with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[40] Yet another claimed that the nation had only been "professedly Christian."[41] A bit more specific, Sally Rochester Ford, the wife of the noted Baptist editor, stressed the want of family religion. "How many households are there in the land," she asked, "where, morning and night, the children and domestics are gathered together to be instructed in the truths of God's word, to sing praises and invoke his guidance and blessing?" Was it any wonder, she cried, that men had wandered astray? It was a lack of family religion that was the cause. "And are not the Christian parents of the land fearfully responsible amid this terrible culmination of evil?"[42]

Shifting from the personal to the social level, one Methodist saw the trouble in the fluctuating moral standards in the wake of the war.[43] A German Reformed paper, in a lengthy exigetical article, found Ezekial's admonition "Are not your ways unequal?" meaningful in this situation. The writer postulated that every society had to find its proper balance between the material, the intellectual, and the spiritual. These must be as delicately balanced as the triune nature

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[39]Christian Intelligencer, Jan. 18, 1874.

[40]Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, XII (Jan., 1874), 6; Reformed Presbyterian Advocate, III (Oct., 1873), 347.

[41]Christian Observer, Oct. 1; Interior, Oct. 2; New York Observer, Nov. 16; Christian Advocate, Dec. 11.

[42]Ford's Christian Repository, XIII (Dec., 1873), 451-452.

[43]Methodist, Sept. 27.

of God. But what were the simple facts in the United States? "Do we not witness in every direction inordinate thirst for riches?" This overemphasis on material at the expense of intellectual and especially spiritual growth was emphatically the cause of all the other causes.[44]

Perhaps more than any other thing, it was this criticism which the churchmen raised against the mid-nineteenth century American code of values. It was evident to most clergy that the first American god was money. T. Dewitt Talmadge pleaded with his countrymen to stop "dashing their lives out against money safes."[45] A Methodist editor called the American moral flaw "an insame desire to overwork, and for double profits, not in honorable ways alone, but in any manner whatever."[46] A Lutheran writer termed it an "insane chase for wealth." One Catholic spoke of the "feverish worship of Mammon," another of an "inordinate thirst for money which gives to our people a disgraceful prominence among the nations of the world."[47]

It was, in fact, the Catholics who were most critical of this strain in American life. "The whole way of living and of doing business here," wrote one, "is vicious, and inflated to the point at which it must soon burst."[48] If the Protestants recognized and condemned

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[44]Reformed Church Messenger, Jan. 7, 1874.

[45]Sermon of Sept. 18, reprinted in New York Herald, Sept. 22.

[46]Western Christian Advocate, Nov. 26.

[47]Lutheran Standard, July, 4, 1874; Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 2; Catholic Standard, Dec. 13; see also Zion's Herald, Sept. 25; Churchman, Oct. 4; Sermon of Rev. J. J. White, Sept. 28, reprinted in New York Herald, Sept. 29.

[48]New York Freeman's Journal, Sept. 27.

this grasping flaw with a bit of dismay as to its exact source, the Catholics were certain that "the godless character of the present generation" lay in the public school system, where "no catechism of religion is taught /the students/, but where they have been trained sharply to understand 'Addition, Subtraction, and Silence!'"[49] Was it any wonder that "infidelity and skepticism are growing more widespread; the habit of sin has taken deep root in the souls of the generality of mankind; the world riots in crime; unbelief is more prevalent than it ever was?" Certainly under these circumstances, they for one were willing to speak of the Panic as God's "terrible retribution" upon the American people. And who, they asked, could question its justice?[50]

Most frequently cited as evidence of the growing materialism in American life was the trend toward extravagent living. The Presbyterian warned that "living deliciously" was the great sin of Babylon, the "ideal goddess of all worldliness."[51] One Methodist writer was more explicit, describing the fault as a "fondness for unnatural pleasures, for immodest gains, /and/ excessive personal aggrandizement." The United States had, like the prodigal son, wasted its riches upon riotous living, and now had come to utter ruin.[52]

Many were even glad to see this distress fall upon the nation.

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[49]Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 2; New York Freeman's Journal, Oct. 4, Sept. 29.

[50]Louisville Catholic Advocate, Apr. 30, 1874.

[51]Presbyterian, Nov. 29.

[52]Western Christian Advocate, Nov. 19; see also Methodist, Jan. 17, 1874; Ladies' Repository, Dec. 1873; Herald and Presbyter, Oct. 2; Christian World, Oct. 2.

This was true not only for those who saw the panic as the harbinger of religious revival, but also those who saw the chief American flaw as pride. They were fond of recalling the indictment of Abraham Lincoln in 1863 when he called for a day of fasting and prayer: "Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us." Now that humble Lincoln spoke again to a nation overly pleased with its own growth and its great material success.[53] Now in the midst of social crisis, many clergymen wondered if the growth had matched spiritual quality to its material quantity. Certainly the machine age had made America great, but now, as one Southerner said, "we are ground by the machinery with which we affect to supercede and assist labor, and wear ourselves out in the prosecution of that which is intended to save us from trouble."[54] The United States was the only country in the world, quipped an Episcopalian writer, which built hotels where no one was ever comfortable, but everyone could ride to the sixth floor in an elevator![55]

In fact, some viewed the entire urban environment as an unwelcome by-product of American ingenuity. The cities which had been built were nothing but "cesspools of corruption" and "hot-beds of vice and crime." One of the chief lessons which some drew from the panic was that "before a man cuts himself loose from the scenes of farm life to engage in the din and noise of the city, he should well

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[53]Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, XI (Aug., 1873), 292.

[54]Central Presbyterian, Sept. 17.

[55]Churchman, Nov. 22; also Lutheran Standard, Nov. 15.

consider the consequences."[56]

Even more shocking to the clerics was the state of the nation's political morality. "Who that considers the dreadful picture presented by our republic at the present period, can hesitate in advising all good men to join in the cause of God and morality? Look at the conditions of our republic. Legislation had been prevented; trusts violated with impunity; honor is ridiculed; land grabs, salary steals, and railroad slanders have been the order of the day."[57] The implication was that national power was responsible to God, and "the nation and kingdom that will not serve Zion shall perish, yea, those nations shall utterly perish."[58]

But whatever the evils that they stressed--be it the want of personal piety, the unwarranted pride of the nation, or an undue reliance on material possessions--the interpretation which they laid upon the Panic of 1873 was that "the cause of this disorder, this disharmony, is sin."[59] "When will we ever learn," asked the New York Observer, "that

> they that are rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hateful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have

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[56]Christian World, Oct. 23; Central Presbyterian, Sept. 24; Christian Advocate, Sept. 25; Herald and Presbyter, Jan. 21, 1874; Irish Catholic Benevolent Union Journal, Oct., 1873; also Robert D. Cross, "The Changing Image of the City Among Catholics," Cath. Hist. Review, XLVIII (Apr., 1962), 35-36.

[57]Irish Catholic Benevolent Union Journal, Nov., 1873.

[58]Associate Presbyterian, XV (Sept., 1873), 127; also Church Eclectic, Mar., 1874.

[59]Herald and Presbyter, Oct. 2.

erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 60

The Reverend Theodore Cuyler of Brooklyn suggested that this verse (it is I Timothy 6: 9-10) be posted on every counting house door.[61] One Catholic seemingly spoke for all when he wrote: "The reflection that must come to the Christian who is observant of the disorders which have sprung up in our American world of finance should be: there is something of more value than money. If there is not, then our religion is in vain."[62] All of which was to have implications for the churchmen's suggestions for remdies for the panic. For if, as Cuyler reasoned, "it may be said in one word that the suffering had come from sinning," than the only real remedy was a return to the paths of righteousness. All of which lent still further credence to the belief that the panic was meant as a prelude to a period of religious revival. "Is any man afflicted, let him pray."[63]

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[60] New York Observer, Sept. 25.

[61] For similar ties of panic to sin see Religious Herald, Oct. 9; Western Christian Advocate, Nov. 26.

[62] Louisville Catholic Advocate, Oct. 2.

[63] Evangelist, Oct. 2; Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, XII (Jan., 1874), 8.

THE SEARCH FOR RECOVERY

Because the churchmen diagnosed the causes of the panic as basically religious in nature, it was natural that they should turn first to spiritual solutions in their search for recovery. As the argument went, to restore confidence in the market, the nation should practice "Biblical morality" and keep its trust in the Lord. "The storm will be past," marked the editor of the Presbyterian, "when men have turned from their idols, and have learned that there is a God who will gain his ends, if not in mercies, in disasters."[1]

In more general terms, the cause of the panic had been found in the "act of the creature dissociating itself from the Creator,"[2] Any attempted solution therefore had to begin with a reconciliation of man with his God.

Because of this belief in the necessity of reconciliation before reform, there was an almost unanimous disdain among the editors for those who attempted purely secular reform, especially by legislation or government action as a remedy for the ills of the financial crisis. The crisis was basically moral rather than financial and a Catholic journal scoffed at the "prevailing opinion that a majority of votes can supply any lack of brains or deficit of moral character."[3] Most of the press placed little, if any, faith in collective solutions from the political world. "The grand want of our times," one explained,

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[1] Presbyterian, Oct. 4.

[2] Christian World, Nov. 20.

[3] Brownson's Quarterly Review, II (Jan., 1874), 123.

"is individual action. People are too much afraid of doing anything alone. We crystallize activity into cold formality by our cumbersome machinery."[4]

Large government was by definition evil--perhaps a necessary evil, but nonetheless an evil. Politicians were, again by definition, suspect of corruption, a suspicion not altogether unfounded in the political world of the 1870's. The Presbyterian, likening the great fires of Chicago and Boston to the Biblical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, warned the Washington politicos that a Mrs. O'Leary with cow and lamp might well be found suitable for their city also.[5] Certainly the best thing for Congress to do with regard to the panic was simply to keep its hands off the nation's finances--and that back salary as well, it was generally added![6] Many of the churchmen were certain that political corruption had been a significant source of the crisis and almost all expressed smug satisfaction when Boss Tweed was finally deposited behind bars.[7]

Both Grant and W. A. Richardson, the Secretary of the Treasury, came under severe attack for their handling of the panic. Both were "profoundly ignorant of the first principles of public finance," charged Brownson's Quarterly Review.[8] The church papers were especially disappointed with the financial section of Grant's State of the

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[4]Christian Mirror, Dec. 2.

[5]Presbyterian Banner, Dec. 31; Presbyterian, June 30, 1874.

[6]Interior, Nov. 20.

[7]Evangelist, Jan. 7, 1874; Presbyterian Quarterly, III (Jan., 1874), 117.

[8]Brownson's Quarterly Review, II (Jan., 1874), 123.

Union message in December. The Independent remarked that no one could doubt its authorship because no one but Grant could have fallen so short! "Wanted at Washington," they cried, "a first class financier."[9] Certainly, said one Catholic editor, "it will take a bigger man than Grant."[10]

The advice that Grant was getting from Congress ("it seems to be in a fog," complained the Independent[11]) and especially from Richardson gave the churchmen little consolation. When Richardson decided to resume silver payments in October, the editors could not decide whether to laugh or cry. The Independent called it a "lilliputian scheme," "more like child's play than anything else." "If this is the best the Treasurer can do, we advise him to practice the virute of 'masterly inactivity' and wait for the 'good time coming' when he can do better."[12]

The most extreme criticism of the administration came, as we might expect, from the most conservative churches, the Associate and the Reformed Presbyterian. These small groups saw the government as "unchristian and atheistic, totally dominated by depraved infidels."[13] All of this was, of course, consistent with their participation in the National Reform Association, a group sworn to forego political parti-

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[9]Independent, Dec. 11, 18; also New York Observer, Dec. 11.

[10]Pilot, Oct. 4.

[11]Independent, Dec. 18.

[12]Independent, Nov. 6; also Interior, Oct. 30; Herald and Presbyter, Oct. 30; Independent, Nov. 13; and George Anderson, "The Proposed Resumption of Silver Payments in 1873," Pacific Historical Review, VIII (Sept., 1939), 301-316.

[13]Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, XI (Aug., 1874), 290.

cipation until the Lordship of Christ was recognized in the Preamble of the United States Constitution. From their point of view, it was certainly not surprising that economic troubles befell a nation which refused to recognize divine authority.[14]

The lack of enthusiasm for government action among those who populated the vast conservative middle of the American churches was, however, somewhat more sophisticated in its logic than that of the National Reform Association. Most clergymen found the efforts of this ultra-conservative group to insert a recognition of the Lordship of Christ into the written frame of government as naive as it was futile. Although they did, in a broad sense, agree with the principle that government was divine and that it must be based upon the love of Christ, most clergymen did not allow themselves to become ensnared upon Constitutionality. They were not enthusiastic about government action because they simply believed that it was unable to reach the root of the problem, which was moral and spiritual rather than purely financial. And it was a simple fact that legislation cannot create "moral revolutions." Only the church could do this.[15]

This reliance upon purely human solutions was the basic error of all the secular thought of the day, especially the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill. In fact, "the present general demoralization," explained a Baptist spokesman, "was due to ultra-utilitarianism." "Such a standard discounts virtue, and puts a tempting premium upon vice; strengthens the unholy passion for wealth and weakens the moral

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[14] Associate Presbyterian, XV (Sept., 1873), 97.

[15] Interior, Nov. 13.

restraints that lie in the way of its dishonest getting."[16] Laurens Hickok, professor of moral philosophy at Amherst, was quite explicit in denouncing the "sinfulness of selfishness." Man simply "should not legislate for happiness . . . . Nowhere can selfishness appear more sinful than when making and obeying laws for its greater happiness."[17] To seek happiness directly as Mill and the social scientists did was to lose it. Quite obviously, for the orthodox churchmen, all happiness came from God, not from human government. The ultimate, therefore, was worthiness to be happy, not happiness itself. "Then nothing hinders God in his paternal love from making us happy."[18] In terms of this financial crisis, this meant that the nation should seek righteousness as the road to prosperity rather than seek prosperity per se. The stress lay upon "seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto ye."[19] "Let society do this," promised one Reformed clergyman, "and all will be well. Let society neglect to do this, and we are persuaded that no amount of legislating or economizing or benefactions in any other view will radically accomplish the end."[20] This was a strong statement of priorities, and one which held the key to the conservative approach to remedies to the panic. To those who charged that such an approach was unreal and idealistic, the churchmen merely countered that "it is the sort of

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[16] Baptist Quarterly, VII (Oct., 1873), 471.

[17] Presbyterian Quarterly, III (Jan., 1874), 34-35.

[18] Ibid., 37-41.

[19] The verse is Luke 12: 31.

[20] Reformed Church Messenger, Jan. 7, 1874.

Utopianism without which American life will pretty certainly go to the bad."[21]

This moralism was applied to the area of financial policy, especially as an argument for the resumption of specie payments. The clergy had always viewed greenbacks as a rather unnatural medium of exchange, humanly instituted at the expense of the more natural, God-ordained specie. They were further suspect as an immoral, dishonorable method of handling a national debt. The Christian at Work had always referred to greenbacks as "legal (?) tenders" and the Baptist Watchman now vowed that the "4th of July, 1876, must not dawn upon $400,000,000 of dishonorable national paper."[22] In general, then, they believed that the continued use of legal tender currency after the end of the war was a "fundamental breach of faith and morality by the nation itself."[23] Lyman Atwater of Princeton argued in a Scribners' article that this was no more defensible than the continued use of martial law, conscription, military occupation, or the suspension of habeas corpus would have been.[24] For many, resumption became a sort of panacea for all of the nation's moral faults and patience ran thin when the government made no move to extract a return to specie from the crisis. A Catholic editor in New York fumed that if the United States government were not "utterly imbecile, /it/ would have seen a rare opportunity was given it to resume specie payments." "Had it done so," he

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[21]Churchman, Nov. 22.

[22]Christian at Work, Apr., 1874; Watchman, Apr. 16, 1874.

[23]Presbyterian Quarterly, III (Jan., 1874), 101; also New York Observer, Nov. 27; Christian Advocate, Dec. 18; Independent, Nov. 27.

[24]Scribner's, VII (Dec., 1873), 218.

continued, "the result would have been instant relief to the money market, a destruction only to gamblers on values they have not. But our 'government' is the biggest fool in the country."[25] Now the nation was paying the price for its sin. The greenbacks had led to speculation and speculation to panic. The only way to recover the nation's morality and therefore the economic equilibrium was a return to specie. "It makes little difference," claimed Atwater, "who are in favor of it or against the measure, if it is right."[26]

Linking inflation to immorality as they did, the churchmen reacted violently to federal proposals to release the $44 million treasury "surplus" as a relief to the panic. Perhaps, a few conceded, this would give temporary relief, but in the long run it would make a return to specie even more difficult. At any rate, it was absurd to give the surplus to "unscrupulous cliques" who had just proved their inability to handle their own money.[27] If any Westerners argued that the farmers needed more money, the Methodist suggested that they should raise more corn and pigs and cotton. "Got in that way it will stay with them."[28]

Regardless of clerical pressure, however, the Administration released some $26 million of the surplus by January, 1874, trying to bolster the sagging economy. The Interior was aghast at Grant's action. Lyman Atwater likened the action to a drunkard consuming more

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[25]New York Freeman's Journal, Oct. 4.

[26]Presbyterian Quarterly, III (Apr., 1874), 359.

[27]New York Observer, Oct. 2.

[28]Methodist, Apr. 11, 1874.

liquor to cure a hangover: "his liquor prostrates him after a transient exhilaration."[29]

In April, 1874, when Congress considered a bill authorizing still further inflation, the press was aroused to even more vicious denunciation. The Evangelist, having initially been sympathetic toward inflation, now joined its more orthodox fellow churchmen and warned:

> The thing is impossible. Tampering with currency inflation is not only impolitic, but suicidal. Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. If we are to have knavery, let not Congress abet it by violating the plighted faith of the nation. 30

Once the Inflation Bill was passed, conjecture began on whether or not Grant would save the nation with a veto. There were a few optimists, but most agreed with the Interior that there was little that could be done except to "mark the scoundrels for the next election."[31] But Grant, acting from what the Presbyterian deemed "conscientious conviction," did veto the bill. The elation of the church press could hardly be contained. Almost over night Grant became once again a hero. The Christian Advocate rejoiced in the nation's good "fortune in finding as its chief agent a man so true and unselfish as Pres. Grant has shown himself to be."[32] The New York Observer

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[29]Interior, Jan. 8, 1874; Scribner's, V (Apr., 1874), 743.

[30]Evangelist, Apr. 30; also strongly against the Inflation Bill were the Pilot, Apr. 11; Christian at Work, Apr. 2, 1874, among others.

[31]Interior, Apr. 19, 1874.

[32]Christian Advocate, Apr. 30, 1874; also Presbyterian, May 2; Interior, Apr. 30; Presbyterian Banner, Apr. 29; Methodist, May 2; Christian Mirror, Apr. 28.

concluded that

> we have looked upon this financial question from a religious standpoint, believing that the vast deluge of paper money has demoralized the people, and greatly increased the number of defalcations, thefts, and swindles, &c., of the few years past. We thank God that a check has been put upon it. 33

The churchmen, therefore, were generally opposed to any sort of government financial activity to halt the panic that went beyond the government's simply disengaging itself from fiscal affairs. Revision of banking laws and currency manipulation were seen as irrelevant to the basic moral problem that they saw at the source of the crisis. But all of this is negative. If they discounted this type of activity as a proper solution for the crisis, what positive steps, if any, did they recommend for the probelms lying behind the panic?

Perhaps the earliest suggestions were made in the area of business ethics. In general, as we have noted, the church press was sympathetic to "honest businessmen" who had fallen because of the speculation. They took this opportunity, therefore, to call for a revival of Christian business practices. Essentially what they were demanding was a return to "old-fashioned virtue," to the realization that "all business transactions, trifling or extensive, affect our moral as well as our monetary interests."[34] The real preventive against panics was to rid the business community of gamblers, speculators, and other "pirates and thieves" who sought to take more than

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[33] New York Observer, Apr. 30, 1874.

[34] Methodist, Oct. 4; New York Observer, Jan. 1, 1874.

their just share of God's providence.[35]

If on one hand, wealth was a blessing from God, bestowed as a reward for "industry and self-denial on the part of the possessor," it was only valuable as long as it was "turned to noble uses." There was, therefore, a great emphasis placed upon encouraging, even demanding, that businessmen accept the social responsibility which was a natural consequence of their position. As the Reverend Henry Powers of the New York Church of the Messiah put it in a sermon of September 28, "Wealth shall be salvation" if it is used "with the meekness of the children of God."[36] The emphasis was clearly that wealth had to be both gained and disposed of within the laws of God or it would be lost by the hand of God. "If a professed disciple would not have his secular business become as a millstone about his neck to drown him in perdition," warned the Reformed Church Messenger, "he must be a man of prayer; he must daily secure spiritual communion with God."[37]

One specific aspect of business morality which caught the attention of the more conservative churchmen was the lack of strict Sabbath observance. The denunciation of Sabbath rail service was virtually unanimous among the Protestants. So rigid was this belief that President Grant was even criticized for traveling to New York on the Sabbath to discuss the Cooke failure (which in this instance was defined not as a moral issue but purely "pecuniary and worldly").

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[35]Christian Observer, Nov. 4; Interior, Oct. 30.

[36]New York Herald, Sept. 29.

[37]Reformed Church Messenger, Mar. 25, 1874.

The ultimate in profanity, however, was the railroad practice of offering one-half fares for Sunday excursions and thus encouraging the sin of others.[38] The ultra-conservative Reformed Presbyterian Advocate warned those who dared to profane the Sabbath in this fashion:

> Let the hum of busy toil cease. Let the ledger lie closed on the desk. Let the hammer rest upon the anvil. Let the wheel in the factory cease to revolve. Let the mine send forth its thousands into the light of the new born day of the Son of Man. Yea, let all the labors of both man and beast be set aside.
>
> Not withstanding the many threats and warnings that God has given in his word and by his providential dealings with men, there are thousands who in their ambition to become great in the eyes of men, and in their great haste to grow rich in this world's profits, will even dare to tempt God, who, out of Christ, is a consuming fire.
>
> It is the testimony of an infidel, that he had learned by sad experience, a curse always followed those who break the Sabbath day. 39

More common, however, than sabbatarianism, was the call to abandon extravagance and return to frugality. "Frugality," claimed the Independent, "is the only safe path to solvency."[40] The Methodist was certain that the proper cure was "to change our habits, to practice frugality; in a word to earn our dollar before we spend it, and to spend less than we earn."[41]

Since this whole consideration of business ethics and the

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[38]Rocky Mountain Presbyterian, Feb., 1874; Christian Observer, Oct. 22.

[39]Reformed Presbyterian Advocate, VII (Nov., 1873), 395-396; see also Christian Intelligencer, Feb. 26, 1874; Christian Mirror,

[40]Independent, Sept. 25.

[41]Methodist, Jan. 17, 1874; see also Christian Observer, Dec. 10.

social responsibility of wealth was basically a moral question, there was little that the state could do. The Churchman emphasized that the remedy must be found by business itself. It must take the responsibility to cut itself free from the speculative interests. It was, in the last analysis, a question of moral rather than financial renovation.[42]

Some clergymen did see a limited role for the government in punishing "criminal actions" by businessmen. Lyman Atwater, for example, although clearly demonstrating his dislike for government banks, urged the federal government to impose "infamous penalties for all perversion, speculative risking, or any kind of stealing or embezzlement of their funds, by the management and officers" of financial institutions.[43] But the government's role could not go beyond this. Honest businessmen, chastened by the fate of their deposed associates, would then voluntarily "shorten their sail until the gale blows over." The government need do nothing about the removal of financial distress; left to itself, "the ship /will/ be brought right again."[44] The honest businessman realized that

> the duty of a Christian is to do business on those principles only which will bear the scrutiny of the divine mind and will, and He who sees the end from the beginning, will not approve when a man makes contracts to pay, without having securities that will enable him to meet his engagements, despite the vicissitudes of the times. [45]

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[42]Churchman, Oct. 4.

[43]Presbyterian Quarterly, III (Jan., 1874), 117.

[44]Christian Observer, Dec. 10; Evangelist, Sept. 25.

[45]New York Observer, Nov. 6.

In brief, the task for the business community was not to engage the government in building institutional windbreaks against panics as most secular observers were suggesting but rather to realize that God's way was the best and for that matter the only way. The panic, if it showed nothing else, showed the "vanity of visible and earthly goods."[46] The panic showed that only industry and integrity really paid off, that it was impossible for a man to keep ill-gotten wealth indefinitely. The Churchman admitted that perhaps it did not know much about the worldly arts of finance and accounting, "but we do know something of that which is greater than business--the law of God. That cannot be violated with impunity."[47]

It was this realization that retribution would follow sin in the natural order of things and that only righteousness could insure permanent success which churchmen were certain would act more efficiently than government regulation as a sufficient motivation for ethical business practice. "On a mere basis of dollars and cents," wrote the editor of the Illustrated Christian Weekly, "I believe godliness is profitable."[48] The only method of avoiding financial embarrassment was perfectly clear:

> God's special blessing must be continually sought in connection with business cares and labors. Faith must make its appeal to the Heavenly Father, to keep its soul amid the many and powerful temptations which are found in all walks of secular life. 49

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[46]Christian Mirror, Oct. 21; Also New York Observer, Oct. 2.

[47]Churchman, Oct. 4.

[48]Illustrated Christian Weekly, Oct. 4.

[49]Christian Mirror, Oct. 28.

But it was not enough for the Christian businessman to merely acquire his money by morally acceptable means. He was also expected to use his money in a Christian fashion. This stress upon the social responsibility of wealth and position was a key factor in motivating the charitable work of the church in the wake of the panic. But the church's attitude toward the distribution of charity was not simply a function of this belief in Christian social responsibility. It was, on the other hand, tempered by a similar link of poverty to immorality.

As we have seen in this discussion of business ethics, the orthodox clergy made a close connection between morality and the possibility of business success.[50] A similar link was also applied to the working class. If a laborer were righteous, they said, he would surely prosper. Each man, urged the Catholic Standard, should devote himself "with all his strength to the work which God has set before him."[51] The key was that God had placed each man in his station and commanded him to do his best in that calling. "Whatsoever your hands find to do," said another, "do it with your MIGHT."[52]

If one were faithful in this manner, there would be no suffering. There was always plenty of work for men who were "honest, pure, intelligent, active, industrious, obedient, steady, obliging, polite, and neat."[53] With this as their philosophy, their advice to the laborer

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[50]See Irwin Wyllie, The Self-Made Man in America (N.Y.: Free Press, 1966), 64-65.

[51]Catholic Standard, Dec. 13.

[52]Reformed Presbyterian Advocate, VII (Nov., 1873), 402.

[53]Central Presbyterian, Dec. 17.

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If one were faithful in this manner, there would be no suffering. There was always plenty of work for men who were "honest, pure, intelligent, active, industrious, obedient, steady, obliging, polite, and neat."[53] With this as their philosophy, their advice to the laborer

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[50]See Irwin Wyllie, The Self-Made Man in America (N.Y.: Free Press, 1966), 64-65.

[51]Catholic Standard, Dec. 13.

[52]Reformed Presbyterian Advocate, VII (Nov., 1873), 402.

[53]Central Presbyterian, Dec. 17.

in the midst of the distress after the panic was to work at any job, even at low wages, until something better came along--the optimistic implication being that if he worked hard enough, God would ensure that something better would come along. W. D. Wilson expressed the credo succinctly at a meeting of top Episcopalians in 1874: "Be content with your wages; work for what you get, but work; . . . deserve more, and in the Lord's time you will get more if you deserve it."[54]

The unfortunate corollary of this belief that God cared for the diligent and faithful worker, however, was that those who suffered from the panic were, by reverse logic, lazy and slothful. Certainly things were difficult, but if each operative had saved $200 to $500 they would not be in this trouble now. It was useless to argue that the workers had not the means to save such money because that was simply admitting that they were trying to live above their appointed station. "A good man shall have what he needs," explained one editor, "not always what he thinks he need. Providence intends the supply of our necessities but not our desires."[55]

Perhaps now that the panic was upon them, said the editor of the Christian, the poor would muse over the money that they wasted upon half-priced cigars, circus tickets, wines, satins, rings, and other "precious gewgaws." "By reckoning up the cost of these trifles, and distributing it over the period of hard times, with about ten cents worth of hasty pudding a day, most of the poor people will be

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[54]quoted in Lionel Mitchell, "The Episcopal Church and the Christian Social Movement in the 19th Century," Hist. Mag. Prot. Episc. Church, XXX (Sept., 1961), 174.

[55]Interior, Dec. 14; Christian Observer, Sept. 30; Reformed Presbyterian Advocate, VII (Feb., 1874), 72.

able to weather the storm, and those who really come to want can no doubt get aid by applying to the plain old-fashioned folk who are 'so stingy,' 'so particular,' 'so penurious,' that they have no money to waste on fooleries; and who save their earnings to supply the needs of prodigal sons and daughters who are out of work and out of money."[56]

All of this could not help but influence the church's attitudes toward the distribution of charity. Certainly if a man were poor simply because of his own indolence, it did not really help to give him money. In fact, it was greatly feared that indiscriminate charity would make matters worse since it would make begging more profitable than working. One had to be especially careful of street beggars. The only way to deal with such laggards was to terminate the handouts and the man would be forced to work, which, after all, was undoubtedly the reason that God had made poverty the inevitable result of immoral living in the first place. "We can only say," commented the Evangelist, "that when every door is firmly closed against the professional beggar he will cease his operations, and evidently not until then; . . . do not give to beggars, and begging will stop of itself."[57]

The key to any successful charity program was to separate those

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[56]Christian, Dec., 1873. The stress of many of the clergy was upon the money wasted upon liquor. One minister appearing before the Congressional Committee investigating the causes of the depression stated, "I consider that nine-tenths of our poverty, nine-tenths of the wretchedness that exists in our land is all by the beer-guzzling and whiskey drinking." (House Misc. Doc. 29, 45th Cong., 3d Sess., p. 149). Also see Abell, Catholics, 29, for an expression of the same theme at the 1866 Plenary Council at Baltimore.

[57]Evangelist, Oct. 30. See also Illustrated Christian Weekly, Dec. 6; New York Observer, Nov. 11; Christian Observer, Nov. 12.

who were poor because of their own sloth from those who were poor through no fault of their own. In each case the poverty was supported by a divine purpose. In the first case it was a means of discipline and correction (and therefore something which men should not really try to ameliorate) and in the second case, it was an object for charitable activity by the well to do. As one church paper wrote, "It is /God's/ design that the poverty and suffering and want of this world shall be a means of training his people to deeds of benevolence and charity for the relief of the distitute and distressed; that thus, while benefiting the poor and others by their kindness and acts of mercy, they may thereby be morally cultured in heart and soul."[58]

These dependent poor (such as children, women, invalids, imbeciles, and the elderly) had not really committed any grievous sin themselves but were poor because of the sinful negligence of those friends and relatives whose rightful duty it was to care for them. Toward these people, the clergymen were anxious to mobilize the full resources of the Christian community. Such, they claimed, was truly the highest moment of Christendom.

In fact, the Christian was compelled to support these poor. It was part of the social responsibility which was in turn an integral part of the return to piety which the clergy saw as the way out of the financial crisis. It was impossible to be truly pious without being charitable. This was the reason for the existence of the worthy poor. God could undoubtedly remove their poverty himself, "but then there would be no traits of resemblance between the Heavenly Father who

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[58] Lutheran Observer, Dec. 26; also Louisville Catholic Advocate, Nov. 13; Pittsburgh Catholic, Nov. 7.

lavishes his blessing on all, and the child whose world is himself."[59] This was, indeed, the greatest opportunity to be truly Christian. To do less was to make a mockery of Christianity. "A Christianity which preaches to the head one day in the week and lets the stomach starve in seven days is not worth much however highly valued by its possessors."[60] One Catholic editor put the challenge even more bluntly: "Think of the poor and remember that GOD regards them, and that He regards you, too. Then think of what the Church teaches you and enjoins on you through the revelation of GOD committed to her, and GO AND DO IT."[61] The Christian who failed to fulfill his charitable obligations and accept the responsibility of wealth and position, "has laid up an account which he must one day meet, where riches and position do not balance justice and mercy."[62]

In this context the panic and the distress which followed in its wake were viewed as great opportunities for the Christian church. M. B. Anderson, speaking at the October, 1873, meeting of the Evangelical Alliance, argued that this practical exhibition of Christianity was the best defense of the Christian religion in the secular world.[63] "The churches can do more this winter to advance the cause

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[59] Louisville Catholic Advocate, Nov. 13.

[60] Christian at Work, Feb. 5, 1874.

[61] Louisville Catholic Advocate, Nov. 6; Christian Intelligencer, Jan. 8, 1874; Herald and Presbyter, Dec. 24; Pittsburgh Catholic, Nov. 7; Pilot, May 7, 1874; Christian at Work, Feb. 5, 1874.

[62] Louisville Catholic Advocate, Nov. 13.

[63] M. B. Anderson, "The Right Use of Wealth," in Philip Schaff and S. I. Prime, eds., Evangelical Alliance (N.Y.: Harper, 1874), 362; Also see Presbyterian Banner, Jan. 21, 1874, for similar thoughts on this matter.

of Christ by good works, than all the caviliers and rationalists can do to cast discredit upon them in ten years of detraction and dispute."[64] As another editor wrote in his Christmas edition:

> There is no exhibition of practical Christianity more important, and no duty more imperative, than that which the present destitution calls into action.[65]

And, in truth, the churches did participate in a considerable amount of charity work during the winter of 1873-1874. There had always been a heritage of charity work tied to evangelical religion and now in the midst of economic crisis it was heightened.[66] Almost all of the church weeklies ran vivid descriptive articles portraying the suffering of the unemployed. One went so far as to give a graphic account of the day-by-day sensations of starving. The intention of this sensational reporting was to make it quite clear to the church community that it was time to call up the "reserve force" of Christianity to meet the crisis.[67]

The papers were full of suggestions for individual action to alleviate the physical needs of the poor. What was the responsibility

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[64] Interior, Nov. 13.

[65] Herald and Presbyter, Dec. 24.

[66] See Carroll S. Rosenberg, "Evangelicalism and the New City: A History of the City Mission Movement in New York, 1812-1870," (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia Univ., 1968); Leah Hannah Feder, Unemployment Relief in Periods of Depression: A Study of Measures Adopted in Certain American Cities, 1857 through 1922 (N.Y.: Russell Sage Foundation, 1936); Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (N.Y.: New York Univ. Press, 1956); Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (N.Y.: Abingdon, 1957).

[67] Louisville Catholic Advocate, Feb. 5, 1874; Zion's Herald, Feb. 5, 1874; Also Christian Observer, Nov. 11; Lutheran Observer, Nov. 13; Illustrated Christian Weekly, Dec. 6; Christian at Work, Jan. 22, 1874; Pilot, Mar. 7, 1874.

of the individual Christian in these cases? First, since work was always preferrable to mere charity, it was the duty of the layman to supply work whenever possible. If this was impossible, or if there was still an excess of unemployed, then the individual was to search out the needy and supply their needs. As one editor put it, he was to "explore every house, hut, and hovel where poverty may hide, and see to it that no human being suffers for want. . . ." The church was terribly impressed by this type of individualistic, paternal charity. Instances like the students of Yale College giving their used clothing for the unemployed of New Haven were cited as examples of the true Christian spirit.[68]

In all of this charitable work the individual was to keep in mind the distinction between the worthy and unworthy poor. It was his responsibility to know each recipient personally to insure that the donation would be well used. Because of this, the churches were very much opposed to mass charity projects like the soup kitchens set up in New York with a $30,000 donation from newspaperman James Gordon Bennett.[69]

Still, the churches were well aware that in the impersonal conditions of a large city, purely individual charity distribution could be neither sufficient nor discriminate. It was simply indispensable to effective work to have some sort of a charitable organiza-

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[68]New York Observer, Nov. 11; New York Freeman's Journal, Jan. 24, 1874. Also Robert G. Torbet, A Social History of the Philadelphia Baptist Association (Philadelphia, 1944), 204-205; Catholic Standard, Dec. 6; Christian Observer, Nov. 11.

[69]Presbyterian, Dec. 27.

tion which was capable of reaching into large blocks of poverty and separating the worthy from the unworthy recipient.

Thus many churches organized relief societies to better direct the charitable activities of their congregations.[70] More common, however, were attempts to use the resources of the non-sectarian relief societies already in existence. Individuals who knew of no needy persons themselves were urged to make contributions to organizations like the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor which the churchmen guaranteed would distribute the money so as to encourage industry.[71] Many church papers in New York City carried from time to time a list of recommended places to which individuals could refer those who came to them for help. A "poor, friendless boy," for example, should be sent to the Children's Aid Society or the Juvenile Asylum. If someone had need of a job, he was to be sent to the Free Labor Bureau.[72]

Just as the fear of indiscriminate charity forced the churches to rely upon organized charity societies--in fact, the late 19th century Charity Organization Societies were, to a large extent, products of this desire to root out demoralizing charity[73]--so this same fear made the churches very suspicious of governmental relief programs

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[70]See for example, Central Presbyterian, Dec. 10, for the Richmond Relief Association and Abell, Protestants, 41, for the Presbyterian Alliance in Philadelphia; also Interior, Nov. 13, and Christian at Work, Feb. 5, 1874.

[71]Illustrated Christian Weekly, Dec. 13 or Jan. 1, 1874.

[72]See for example, Ibid., Dec. 13.

[73]Feder, Unemployment Relief, 46; Bremner, From the Depths, 51; Robert H. Bremner, American Philanthropy (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), 98-103.

which were generally thought to be too big and too inefficient to properly dispense funds. They did urge the government to continue to hire labor in a normal fashion for the duration of the crisis. But, on the other hand, they were almost unanimously opposed to the creation of additional government jobs or government distribution of relief money.[74]

The emphasis, them, was on an active, but nonetheless cautious benevolent program. The conservative attitude was best described in this statement of principles of charity which appeared in the Illustrated Christian Weekly: (1) "Seek out the needy," (2) "enter into their hearts as well as into their houses," (3) "give employment rather than food, fuel, and clothing, and these rather than money. Do not make paupers of the poor." (4) "Give as we said sympathy, but not pity; pity is akin to contempt." (5) "And wherever you go carry with you Christ, in your heart, by faith and the prayer that is without ceasing." These were the keys to a successful Christian charity.[75]

The emphasis on this connection between charity work and the spreading of the Gospel was a prime characteristic of the church's charity work during the depression. If charity was a Christian duty to wealthy, it was also important as a means of reaching and converting the poor. The connection was certainly not missed by the Roman Catholic clergy who bluntly warned their people to stay away from Protestant charity houses since they were really nothing less than "money-making,

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[74]See Christian at Work, Jan. 15, 1874; Philadelphia Catholic Herald, Nov. 15; New York Observer, Nov. 27; and Evangelist, Dec. 18, 1873.

[75]Illustrated Christian Weekly, Dec. 6.

Protestant Proselytizing institutions."[76] The connection was not an unnatural one considering the tie which was made between poverty and immorality. If, therefore, poverty was the result of immorality, any permanent change had to come from an inner change of heart in the man himself. The problem did not lie in the social or economic conditions so much as it did within the individual. The real responsibility of the wealthy was therefore not only to give material help, but more importantly to make the word of God accessible to the impoverished classes that they might realize their sin, and then to supply work, if at all possible, should the spirit of God touch any of them.[77]

But if the indolent were at times frustrating and perplexing to the churchmen, they were certainly not the most dangerous unchurched element of the lower classes. Quite obviously, this was the communist, that foreign element who believed in "French mob rule," as many churchmen charged. These were the radicals, so the New York Observer claimed, who believed that "every man shall do as he pleases, and if he won't he shall be made to."[78] For these people most of the orthodox churchmen felt not merely contempt, but also fear, because these men professed a desire to fundamentally alter the social order. This was, of course, the basic distinction between the clergy and the radicals. The clergy were willing to help the individual, by charity and by preaching, to survive within the social system. They were not willing,

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[76]See Irish Catholic Benevolent Union Journal, Sept., 1873.

[77]See for example, Presbyterian, Oct. 11; Christian Observer, Nov. 12; New York Observer, Nov. 27; Herald and Presbyter, Dec. 24; Interior, Nov. 13.

[78]New York Observer, Feb. 5, 1874.

however, like the radicals, to alter the system to help the individual. Such attempts, to the church leaders, were samples of the sin of trusting in human agency rather than in the providence of God. In the last analysis, they resulted in the replacement of a "paternal God with blind force."[79]

Consistent with their general interpretation of social issues, communism was also ascribed to moral rather than socio-economic causes. It did not derive its strength from any real social ills, but rather was essentially the work of "infidel radicalism and a thorough ungodliness."[80] Thus the church response to the radical outcry and to specific clashes like the Tompkins Square Riot in New York City on January 13, 1874, was not to question the validity of the workers' demands but rather to question the workers' obvious lack of religion.[80]

Some of the church papers were quite pessimistic about any hope of bringing these radicals into the religious fold. The New York Observer was certain that they were nothing more than a "mass of ignorant, depraved, reckless humanity" and as such it was "too late to convert them into good citizens." They had to be "chained and watched."[81]

The defeatism of the Observer was not, however, really typical. Most felt that religion was sufficiently strong to overcome even the hardest radicalism. The New York Freeman's Journal and the Boston

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[79] Advance, Jan. 8, 1874; Independent, Jan. 1, 1874.

[80] For information on the Tompkins Square Riot see Herbert G. Gutman, "Social and Economic Structure and Depression: American Labor in 1873 and 1874," (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1959).

[81] New York Observer, Feb. 5, 1874.

Pilot both asserted that good Christians (that is, good Catholics) were immune to atheistic and foreign doctrines since that had been "taught of patience and suffering for the love of a Saviour that became poor to teach men obedience. . . ."[82] The Chicago Advance was also certain that "holding inviolate the principles of the Christian religion" would be sufficient to defeat communism.[83] It was no real solution to suppress these infidels by force or merely treat the symptoms, i.e., the economics of the problem. The real answer was, for both the Protestants and Catholics, a renewal of religious faith. As the Presbyterian Banner challenged the church:

> Religion will do more to restrain violence and outbreak, and to correct false theories, than all the constabulary forces and standing armies of Europe. [84]

An essential feature of this belief was that there was no real cause for discord within God's society, no real cause for discontent, no real necessity for reform beyond the reform of the individual character. There was room for all factions within the harmony of Christ. Existing conflicts were simply the result of sin and "human selfishness."[85] Both industrial monopoly and trade unionism were wrong since they were unnatural combinations conspiring against God's order. When both sides became as well aware of their duties as they were of their rights and when Christian love became the "common

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[82] New York Freeman's Journal, Jan. 24, 1874.

[83] Advance, Jan. 8, 1874.

[84] Presbyterian Banner, Dec. 31; also Interior, Dec. 25; Central Presbyterian, July 15, 1874; Rocky Mountain Presbyterian, Jan. 21, 1874.

[85] Catholic Standard, Dec. 16.

atmosphere of the rich and the poor, the collision will end."[86]

As we have seen so far, the religious press, with few exceptions, viewed the entire crisis in theocentric terms. Straying from God was the source; a return to God in one form or another was the cure. Everything else--charity work, campaigns for a return to specie, or admonitions for business honesty--were only important in so far as they contributed toward this general end. They were all searching for a true corrective for immorality, a way toward a general acceptance of righteousness. For the Roman Catholics this usually meant a renewed emphasis upon religious education in parochial schools. The public schools were "godless" and a "device of the devil" carrying their "votaries and their victims to hell."[87] These public schools failed to imbue the youth with a moral code. Instead, the students learned "Jim Fiskism," the lesson that material possessions were the first object of life. "There is but one remedy," claimed the Freeman's Journal, "it is a training of the young in habits and in principles that will make them desire a different aim in life than materialism, or lavishing, of its 'goods' can offer. We must make education more Christian."[88] Another Catholic was certain that the panic showed that

> we have arrived at a state very nearly approaching to national decay, and it is high time to look to our salvation. This can be brought about only by an adherence to the doctrines of Christianity and education of our children in the laws of Christianity, so as to save the coming generation. 89

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[86]Schaff and Prime, eds., Evangelical Alliance, 339.

[87]New York Freeman's Journal, Nov. 18.

[88]Ibid., Jan. 24, 1874.

[89]Catholic World, XVIII (Jan., 1874), 559-560.

For the Protestants, especially those with a strong evangelical background, but also many high-churchmen as well, albeit in a more restrained manner, the call for Christian renewal took the form of revivalism. From the very beginning the panic had been seen as a moral lesson which argued for increased diligence among business and labor and "old-fashioned" virtue in politics. "The real remedy against hard times," said a Lutheran, "is a general, thorough and pervading conformity to a sound Christianity."[90] From this it was only a short reach of the imagination to see the panic as a call for a specific period of revivals. This became the ultimate solution for the nation's financial woes. "What is needed above all other things," cried the Presbyterian Monthly Review, "is a mighty awakening and turning of the people to God."[91]

The key lay in the link between ruin and revival. All along, the clergy had seen the social catastrophe calling men to repentence in a general way. Ruin was always linked to sin as a natural discouragement to sin and a stimulus to righteousness. But the terrible depths of this crisis and the sudden and seemingly inexplicable way in which it had come, led many of the orthodox clergy to believe that this was more than the ordinary working out of God's system. Perhaps it was a special providence leading to a special period of revival. Samuel Mease of the Christian World argued that

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[90] Lutheran and Missionary, Nov. 27.

[91] Presbyterian Monthly Review, XXV (Jan., 1874), 3-4; also Presbyterian Banner, Dec. 17; Herald and Presbyter, Nov. 13; Central Presbyterian, Oct. 8; Christian Mirror, Oct. 21.

> The burning up of property and its destruction by storms; the unusual sacrifice of like things by storm, pestilence, or otherwise, the startling developments of crime and commercial misfortunes of the last year or two, are the terrible arguments which God uses to lead a nation, as well as individuals, to pause in their deathly career, to think and to repent. 92

If anything else were needed to bolster the belief that the ruin was meant to lead to revival, there was always the resort to the historical analogy of 1857 when a panic had indeed led to an "outpouring of the Spirit." "Panics and times of depression have always been marked by special seasons of revival," asserted the evangelist T. Dewitt Talmadge.[93] If 1857 had "brought a harvest of woe, but a pentecost of grace," was it too much to expect it again?[94] Were they not warranted in believing that the panic was a special providence, a special measure of wrath, a chastisement for their moral failings which was destined to spark a revival. Certainly not. "He who is now chastening the land," said one, "is getting ready to pour down upon it rich treasures of grace."[95]

It was really quite logical, they reasoned, for God to "display himself gloriously at times when the weakness of man is most manifest." The panic would lead to a search for causes, therefore to a memory of guilt, then to reflection, emotion, and revival. The duty of the church --and this was its greatest task in this crisis--was to make the word

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[92] Christian World, Oct. 9.

[93] Christian at Work, Mar. 5, 1874.

[94] Presbyterian, Oct. 4.

[95] Religious Herald, Oct. 9.

of God available to anyone whom the grace of God might touch.[96]

During the first months of 1874, churchmen were encouraged by the scattered reports of revivals coming in from around the nation.[97] There was great rejoicing and optimism at the progress of these ingatherings, as they were called. This confirmed their belief that the panic had been a special working of the Holy Spirit. "God be praised for this work," shouted the Christian at Work, "we praise him for all that he is doing and has done. We recognize and rejoice at his Special Providence in the panic as well as in his later manifestation in the conversion of sinners."[98]

The question as to how the church could best fulfill its duties toward the pending revival occupied much of the time of the church journals during the winter of 1873 and 1874. The most common answer was prayer. A Congregationalist challenged the church: "Let us pray that these disasters, so little expected yet so traceable in some respects, to plans and aims against which the word of God utters its warning, may be blessed to the improvement of public morals and to the reviving of pure and undefiled religion."[99]

Some clergymen such as W. W. Patton, however, stressed an involvement of human agency as well as divine authorship of revivals

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[96]Presbyterian, Oct. 11.

[97]See Christian Advocate, Feb. 19, 1874; Methodist, Mar. 21, 1874; Ford's Christian Repository, XIV (Feb., 1874), 238; Lutheran Observer, Feb. 13; Presbyterian, Mar. 14; Presbyterian Monthly Review, XXV (May, 1874), 130; Rocky Mountain Presbyterian, May 27; Central Presbyterian, Feb. 25; Christian Observer, Nov. 5.

[98]Christian at Work, Feb. 5, 1874.

[99]Advance, Oct. 2; also Christian Mirror, Oct. 21; Religious Herald, Oct. 9.

and wrote articles giving step by step instructions for organizing revival meetings, obtaining the aid of professional evangelists, and then sustaining the initial surge of committment with local forces.[100] This type of investigation led some clergymen to reevaluate their current practices in the light of the needs of urban society. One Methodist, for example, began to question whether their practice of frequent pastoral changes was very fruitful in the nineteenth century situation.[101] Some Presbyterians, especially E. D. Morris of Lane Seminary, began to question what could be done to make their rather intellectual form of Calvinism more palatable to the masses. Perhaps, he suggested, it would help to dress up the worship service a little or to hold services at more convenient times for working people. But just as significantly, Morris did not suggest any substantial changes in doctrine. He was certain that Calvinism "enables men more fully to realize how, from their helplessness and their sin, the wondrous scheme of grace gives complete deliverance." And what could be any better suited to reaching men in the midst of crisis?[102]

This attitude was typical of all the staunchly orthodox churchmen, regardless of denomination. They were not suggesting any softenig or remolding of their creed, regardless of what it might be for that particular branch of the church. The Christian doctrine was "right" and therefore had to be preached regardless of the practical consequences. They believed that if the people were too stubborn in their

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[100] New Englander, XXXIII (Jan., 1874), 38-50; see Christian Advocate, Oct. 23; Presbyterian, Mar. 3, Apr. 11, 1874.

[101] Christian Advocate, Oct. 23.

[102] Presbyterian Quarterly, III (Apr., 1874), 201.

sin to heed the warning of this panic, then "the Almighty can write in still more terrible characters and sorer still will be the punishment of him who will not heed."[103] There was no need to make any significant changes: when the prodigal came to starvation then he would come home. If the revival and the resulting end of the depression were slow in coming it was because

> the crisis has not been severe enough; it has only shaken down the loose ones, instead of upheaving the foundations, as in 1857. Our calamities have not yet made us more helpless, more dependent on God, more trustful in him, more prayerful to him, or less confident in man. We have not gotten beyond the thoughts that it is all from the failure of some great banker. 104

This statement could well be taken as a summary of the clerical view of the panic: that the panic had a deeper or higher meaning than that explicit in the "failure of some great banker," that the purpose of the panic was to lead the nation in a return to God, and that the church need not alter its doctrine to meet popular demand because the depths of the crisis would ultimately drive the sinners back to the church. Then and only then would the panic be over.

It cannot be stressed too much that in theory at least, this was not a passive form of response to social catastrophe, but an attempt to reach the deepest roots of the problem. This was not an attempt to avoid the problem, but to solve it. Christianity was the only real reforming power. The response of the church was not a "conservative" response in the strictest of senses; in fact, the word "conservative" was greeted with scorn by most of the orthodox churchmen.

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[103] Christian at Work, Oct. 9.

[104] Presbyterian, Mar. 7; Lutheran and Missionary, Nov. 27.

> Conservatism is a popular word with some excellent men. But conservatism will never correct the evils of our times. It is in fact a relative principle, good or evil, as it happens to be associated. It is frequently the foe of reform, and a barrier to progress. Radical evils require radical remedies. What the times demand is a vigorous aggressive movement of right against vice, of truth against falsehood, or right against prevalent fraud, of genuine, devoted patriotism against a dominant, grasping and destructive selfishness. 105

Their faith was firm that "if you woudl roll the Old Hundred and the Doxology through Wall Street it would put an end to the panic."[106]

In theory, to recapitulate, the prevailing theological interpretation of social catastrophe as an event full of religious meaning was radical in its intentions and beliefs. In practice, however, it quite often became a passive stoicism. Since the panic had some divine purpose behind it, the Christian could not complain too greatly about any suffering he incurred. As one weekly put it, "Now that we are obliged to swallow the medicine which our own excesses have rendered necessary, let us not make wry faces, but take it manfully in the hope that a cure may be effected in due time."[107] There was an unbounding faith that all things worked toward the good to those who love God and that if the Christian allowed God to move in his won way, the good would ultimately emerge, phoenix-like, from the ashes. "Rejoice evermore," they quoted St. Paul, "pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks."

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[105] Baptist Quarterly, VII (Oct., 1878), 472.

[106] Talmadge sermon of Sept. 28, 1873 reprinted in New York Herald, Sept. 29, 1873.

[107] Herald and Presbyter, Dec. 17.

This stoic submission coupled with a performance of their Christian duties of charity and evangelism was the true response of Christian pietism to the panic. "When hard pressed," said another, "hold still and wait on God--wait patiently and steadfastly. Although blessings may tarry, they will surely come in the end. There is a kind of emptying self-will that must take place before God can work in us, and he knows how to take us through the process."[108]

It was this abounding faith in the providence of God, in the ability of the spiritual to affect the physical that most typified the conservative response. "All is not dark, for the things that are for us are greater than all those that are against us, and He who is for us is greater than all the leagued hosts that are against us."[109] It was an insistent optimism which enabled one to shout with the prophet Habakkuk as did one editor,

> Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:
> Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 110

This was the ultimate extension of a definition of social catastrophe as a transcendent event: joyous submission to the obvious will of the Almighty, even in the times of greatest distress. "There is no time when we have not occasion to look cheery and to praise God,"

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[108] Oneida Circular, Dec. 15.

[109] Christian Mirror, Oct. 21.

[110] Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, XXI (Jan., 1874), 8; the verse is Hab. 3: 17-18.

said one editor. "Surely God is better to us than our fears."[111]

[111] Herald and Presbyter, Nov. 11.

It can be said, therefore, that the Panic of 1873 showed the limits of the conservative response to social catastrophe. They were quite anxious to extend their considerable and commendable charitable work, although with the caution occasioned by their fear of creating a permanent class of paupers. On the other hand, however, they would not interest themsleves in attempts to reform either the financial or social structures to build institutional barriers to depression or poverty. They were certain that an eradication of these evils could only come about as the natural correlative of an improvement of individual and public moral character. This goal was also something which they were most anxious to help achieve, especially by evangelism or moral education. Their response to the social collapse of 1873, to simplify greatly, was basically one of social and economic laissez-faire coupled with an active charity program and evangelism.

Where, then, does this leave the conservative clergy in relation to those who felt that an improvement in moral character was not sufficient to the task of improving the living conditions in American society? Was the difference really one of apathy versus involvement as some historians have suggested?[1] Or did the difference run deeper to a fundamentally different view of the nature of social change?

One might suggest that had the clerical conservatism been based

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[1]See for instance, Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (N.Y.: Harper, 1949); or Aaron I. Abell, The Urban Impact on American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard, 1943), 4.

upon a purely secular evaluation of the socio-economic situation, then Henry F. May would probably be right when he argues that they merely needed a sufficient shock to stir them out of their lethargy. But the reality is that the response of the conservative American churchmen to the crisis was not that of purely visceral conservatism. Rather their version of laissez-faire was consistent with, had the sanction of, and even the encouragement of their conservative theology. What this means is that any widening of the church's role in terms of social action had to be accomplished not only by a recognition of the socio-economic necessity of change, but also of the theological advisability of such change.

The intimate connection between the accepted clerical social and economic theories of the 19th century and religious doctrine can be seen most clearly in the college curriculum. In 19th century America, the college course in economics was called "moral and political economy" and was often tied to courses in moral philosophy. Francis Wayland of Brown University (1790-1865) claimed that the "principles of Political Economy are so closely analagous to those of Moral Philosophy, that almost every question in the one may be argued on grounds belonging to the other."[2] Economics, then, was as much a course in ethics as anything else, and ethics had as much practical, financial value as economics. The professors, such as Noah Porter, Lyman Atwater, Francis Wayland, John McVicker, and A. L. Perry, were almost to a man conservative churchmen with the normal dedication to the policy of

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[2]Francis Wayland, Elements of Political Economy (N.Y.: Leavitt, 1837), iv.

laissez-faire coupled with benevolent work and evangelism.[3]

True to their pattern of considering economics as a moral science, the orthodox religious views of the professors deeply colored their presentation and their choices of economic texts. Bentham's secular utilitarianism was anathema; Spencer, Buckle, and Comte were almost unknown inside the classroom except as examples of the disaster awaiting those who had forsaken the values of religion. Even Mill's Political Economy, although tolerated, was suspect because of the author's unorthodox religious position. This prejudice was quite logical to the clergy because they assumed that faulty theology led to errant economics. Francis Bowen of Harvard was convinced that even Kantian idealism was a "mere cover for an attack on all the principles of government and social order."[4] In short, what this meant was that their religious views established the limits of their secular tastes.

The basic pattern of laissez-faire economics that they taught was supported and sanctified, as we have said, by their theological beliefs. This was especially true for the conservative conception of providence. Whatever their differences on other theological matters, all the clergymen held to this basic faith in the providential nature of the world order. It assumed that creation was expressive of divine purpose. God preserved, excited, determined, directed, and governed activity in accord with his ultimate purpose. The construction was, in substance, the Augustinian doctrine of concursive providence. In

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[3]Wilson Smith, Professors and Public Ethics: Studies of Northern Moral Philosophers before the Civil War (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1956), Appendix A, 211-213.

[4]quoted by Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind in American Civilization (N.Y.: Viking, 1949), II, 837.

this view, it was argued that there were two levels of divine, providential control: general providence, the constant order which God gave to the universe and sustained in the form of natural law, and secondly, special providence, those events "brought about apparently by natural laws, yet in fact the result of some special agency on the part of the Deity, either by an original arrangement of natural laws, or the subsequent modification of second causes which lie beyond man's sphere of vision."[5]

In either case, whether indirectly or directly, God guided the action. A failure to recognize this reality, claimed the conservatives, was the basic flaw of the deistic belief in a sort of mechanical, absentee monarch. God was, as C. F. Schmid was fond of stressing, not merely a Creator but also a Sustainer and a Father.[6] Charles Hodge pointed out that he was "the Creator, preserver, and Governor of the world."[7] It was impossible for these theologians to accept a world order which did not operate under the constant guidance of the Almighty. "On such a Providence the best hopes of the human race are built," declared the Bibliotheca Sacra. "Its denial consigns us to the everlasting grind of natural necessity."[8]

It was as a result of this theological premise that the conservative theologians viewed events in a consistent transcendental dimen-

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[5]Edward Hitchcock, Religious Truth, Illustrated from Science (Boston: Phillips, 1857), 107.

[6]C. F. Schmid, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Edinburgh: Clark, 1870), passim.

[7]Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (New York: Scribner, 1872-1873), I, 204.

[8]Bibliotheca Sacra, XXX (July, 1873), 372.

sion. Their task, as they saw it, was to place the economic phenomena in their providential perspective, to understand them in relation to the divine purpose. And, as we have seen in the discussion of their response to the panic, this was indeed their method of interpretation. They believed that the universe was organized on a moral principle, that righteousness was rewarded and sin was punished. God had established and now maintained by general providence and natural law a social order designed to promote the practice of morality. If man followed the moral code, then the system of rewards and punishments would function to his benefit; if not, then to his detriment. Wealth, for instance, was the natural reward for diligence and thrift. Virtuous workmen, A. L. Perry assured, would "infallibly get their due."[9] On the other hand, those who refused to choose the pious life were certain to pay the penalty:

> The Creator has affixed several penalties, which those who disobey this law of their being, can never escape. He who refuses to labor with his hands, suffers, besides the pains of disease, all the evils of poverty, cold, hunger, and nakedness. The results which our Creator has attached to idleness are all to be considered as punishments, which he inflicts for the neglect of this established law of our being. 10

This type of thinking not only was intended as a spur to righteous behavior--since it was profitable to be righteous--but also as a type of practical theodicy. The existence of evil within the world order had always been a perplexing problem to theologians. How could one rationalize the perfection of God with what appeared to be the evident imperfection of his creation? This particular theory of

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[9]A. L. Perry, Elements of Political Economy (N.Y.: Scribner, 1866), 132.

[10]Wayland, Political Economy, 107.

providence, which argued that the order was perfectly prepared to reward virtue and chastise sin, made it possible to explain the existence of evil within the world as the result of human sin and imperfection.

In their discussion of theodicy, the conservative clergy held to a basically Augustinian explanation. St. Augustine had denied from the outset that the chief purpose of human life was happiness in an earthly sense. This was not the criterion for judging the perfection of God's creation. Life was basically a time of moral testing and training, a time of preparation for a better life hereafter. In this context, it was much easier to argue that God had indeed created the best possible order to achieve his ends. It was unimportant if man were unhappy here if the suffering was accepted as an opportunity for moral improvement. And it was in this spirit that all suffering and social catastrophe were to be accepted. They were God's way of disciplining man and leading him toward a greater good. Evil might appear to be haphazard but it was not. Rather, it was designed to promote the moral rectitude of man if he would but heed its lessons. In other words, evil might appear to be purely "natural" or accidental but in the broader sense it was actually an instrument of God's will and contributive toward a greater moral good. This, of course, was the basis for the conservatives' great stress upon the moral lessons which they should derive from the Panic of 1873. Obviously, they believed, it was intended to force man away from the sin which lay at its source.[11]

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[11]For a discussion of this topic see John Hick, Evil and the God of Love (London: Macmillan, 1966).

For those who saw the Panic as a special providence--and as we noted before there were those who were so impressed by the severity and the seeming lack of connection between the crisis and any means of general providence, that they gave it this explanation--the process was more complex but essentially the same. The event was still expressive of God's purpose and designed to lead toward an ultimate benefit. This time, however, it was not the result of the workings of general natural laws, but rather a unique event designed specifically and especially to lead to a specific and unique benefit--in this case a religious revival. Again, there was nothing in this line of thinking which was inconsistent with their theological premises. Quite simply. Edward Hitchcock explained,

> In the divine administration of the affairs of this world, it becomes necessary to raise up instruments, sometimes to punish, and sometimes to bless, individuals and communities. Hence we can often see as much of providential design in the history of the wicked scourges of the world as in its choicest benefactors. 12

This, then, was the theological context within which the conservative theologians interpreted the Panic of 1873. It gave them the particularly supra-historical dimension which we have noticed in their explanation. Thus when they talked about the causation of the panic they tended to raise it up to a supernatural level, to look for an ultimate "why" above and beyond the "how" which satisfied the secular commentators. In fact, even their expressed definition of the term "cause" was different from the secular one. To Mill or Hume, those spokesmen for the secular intelligentsia, "cause" implied solely an invariable sequence or time relationship: x caused y if y invari-

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[12] Hitchcock, Religious Truth, 335.

ably followed x. But "cause" for the conservative clergy, on the other hand, implied an acting being or power. Noah Porter, whose comments on causation were standard within the interdenominational consensus, expressed the concept quite clearly:

> When we say, every event is caused or has a cause, we distinguish between things, their acts, and their products. Every cause is an acting being and an agent acting to some result. The result is the effect. Anything whatever, so far as it it a cause, is a being, and not a phenomenon. It may be itself an effect or product of the action or causal efficiency of another being or beings, but that which is produced is capable of action on its own. A mere phenomenon or event as such, is not regarded as a cause, but only as an effect. What is the difference between an acting being and its capacities, or acts, or attributes, will be considered in its place. It is enough that at present we notice this distinction is real. 13

Not only did they give a transcendental explanation to causation in general and to the Panic in particular but this same tendency extended into other areas. It meant, for example, that they tended to defend those social institutions of which they approved in terms of God-ordained stability, as worthy of preservation because they were consistent with the ultimate purposes of God. Thus, property rights were tied intimately to religion. Hodge, for instance, was certain that any "denial of the right of property is, to a great extent, connected with the rejection of religion and marriage."[14] Specie was preferred to greenbacks and gold and silver were the best money because, as A. L. Perry claimed, "God has evidently designed them for that purpose."[15]

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[13] Noah Porter, The Human Intellect (N.Y.: Scribner, 1869), 571-72.

[14] Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 432.

[15] Perry, Political Economy, 265/

What this meant, then, was that the connection between clerical economics and clerical theology was intimate and consistent. Almost every economic phenomenon had its religious explanation because a successful understanding of the clerical conservatism is that it was religious. Laissez-faire was the right and proper approach to the economy because it was expressive of God's activity in its operation. The intimacy can scarcely be stated with greater force than Francis Bowen did in his economic textbook:

> Man cannot interfere with His work without marring it. The attempts of legislators to turn the industry of society in one direction or another, out of its natural and self-chosen channels,--here to encourage it by bounties, and there to load it with penalties, to increase or diminish the supply of the market, to establish a maximum of price, to keep specie in the country,--are almost invariably productive of harm. Laissez-faire, 'these things regulate themselves,' in common phrase, which means, of course, that God regulates them by general laws, which always, in the long run, work to the good. 16

It was because of this basic theological position that the church refused to see its mission in terms of social reform. It was from this great faith in the providential order of society that the ostensible political conservatism of the mid-nineteenth century American church arose. Because of the belief that the social order was divinely instituted and that suffering and evil were disciplines and means of ultimate benefit, the clergymen quite naturally reasoned that any apparent flaws in the social order were not really flaws in the system itself. Rather they stemmed from man's failure to be reconciled with

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16 Francis Bowen, Principles of Political Economy (Boston: Little-Brown, 1856), 23. Of course, this emphasis upon clerical laissez faire is not characteristic of the church throughout all of its history and these comments are not meant to reflect on the Weber thesis or other times and situations.

his appointed place within it. They were the result of man's impiety and never to be construed as social imperfections.

In this context, any sort of "progress" from a human point of view, that is, in the form of social reform, was impossible. Progress in the clerical synthesis meant the reconciliation of man to God's universal order. There was always the supposition that if man acted righteously, i.e., in accord with God's moral order, he would be blessed; this alone would constitute progress.[17]

Such a relatively static view of the social order was common to all conservative churchmen whether Protestant or Catholic because both groups held basically the same paternal view of God. To conservative Catholics, the function of the church was to act as a brake on unholy attempts at secular progress. Any attempts to change the current order by secular reform was seen as an attack upon God's plan by most Catholic clergy.[18]

This attempt to improve upon God's world was the greatest mistake of socialism, according to John W. Mears, the author of The Bible in the Workshop. What had to be done was to encourage the individual to accept the righeousness of that order. Socialism, however, tried to argue that "the evils of the working classes spring from a wrong entirely out of themselves, [and] summarily [chose] the prominent institutions and orders of society as the guilty cause." But any sane Christian knew that it was folly to try to "regenerate the world

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[17]See Arthur Ekirch, The Idea of Progress in America, 1815-1860 (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1944).

[18]Robert Cross, The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism (Cambridge: Harvard, 1958), 108; Ekirch, Progress, 171.

without regenerating its component individuals."[19]

It was within such a framework that the churches saw their task as that of moral exposition.[20] Social phenomena carried with them spiritual messages and lessons. And if man was to understand this incidence, it was the church that must supply it. The key, the orthodox clergy declared, was the Bible, "the book of providence," which showed man "how to trace out the relation of events apparently casual or discrepant, and to clear up most of the enigmas by which we are surrounded."[21] It was their belief that every benefit and every trial contained the voice of God and the potential for spiritual improvement.

> All are thy messengers, and all
> Thy sacred pleasure, Lord, obey;
> And all are training man to dwell
> Nearer bliss and nearer thee. 22

The church, therefore, was the possessor of divine truth and its mission was to impart this truth and to promote thereby the reconciliation of the individual to the moral order which that truth expressed. This was the secret of progress; reform was an impossible, even sacrilegious, attempt to change God's order. Instead, man's task was submission to the righteousness of that order. A lack of such contrition was the error of social radicalism which discouraged "patience, submission, [and] contentment," and thus "contends vehemently

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[19]John Mears, The Bible in the Workshop (N.Y.: Scribner, 1857), 340-341, 336-337.

[20]Archibald A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology (1860 copyright: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 431.

[21]Hitchcock, Religious Truth, 335.

[22]quoted by Samuel Schmucker, Elements of Popular Theology (Andover: Gould, 1834), 94.

against the doctrine that a condition of suffering and social disadvantage is to be acquiesced in, as allotted by Providence."[23]

Within this context, the stoicism and the stress upon evangelism which we noted in the clerical response to the Panic of 1873 become clearer. Since the basic task of the church was to ensure man's reconciliation to his providential position, the mission of the church was spiritual, i.e., centered on the comfort of the individual soul rather than upon its social surroundings. Since the "noblest of all conceivable ends was a perfect human character," the spreading of the Gospel became the key to progress with perfection defined as spiritual sympathy with God and creation. In short, the social order was not a worldly institution which man was to reconcile with God's law but rather a divine condition with which man himself was to seek reconciliation by his spiritual salvation. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink," they believed, "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Though its instrumentalities are supernatural, the end of them all is the restoration of man to his better self."[24]

The clerical emphasis upon the providential nature of the social system also explains the ambivalence which we noticed in the charity work of the conservative church. In their providential analysis, the churchmen tended to view wealth as the result of virtuous living. At the same time, however, their definition of the righteous life included, as we have seen, the demand for social responsibility in the form of benevolence. In order to encourage such charitable assistance to the

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[23]Mears, Bible, 336.

[24]Noah Porter, Fifteen Years in the Chapel of Yale College (N.Y.: Scribner, 1888), 269.

poor, it was essential that the clergy justify the poor as worthy recipients of charity and as the proper objects of love and mercy. Thus the poor were portrayed as the real "motive power" of the social order, its most virtuous and religious members, humble, satisfied, and pious.[25] They were actually the most God-like members of society because while riches did not bring righeousness, humility did.

On the other hand, however, the belief that in the providential order of society, virtue led to wealth all too often caused the orthodox to insist on a comparable tie between sin and poverty. "Irreligion," Charles Krauth charged bluntly, "makes poverty. Infidelity destroys the temporal property of man. False religion is the mother of temporal suffering."[26] Obviously, the unfortunate were poor for some reason and to many the sins of idleness, sloth, and drink were sufficient for an abundant harvest of woe. God's justice was stern as well as beneficient and "He deserts those who sin, either by withdrawing grace abused, or by withholding additional grace."[27] To render alms in such cases would not have been charitable at all but merely helping sinners escape the hand of God.

It was therefore possible to view poverty as a state of Christ-like humility or as a period of retribution for sin.[28] The two positions did not sit well with each other, especially with men like Krauth who tried to voice both. The ambivalence was so severe in

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[25]Charles P. Krauth, Poverty (Pittsburgh: Haven, 1858), 35-36.

[26]Ibid., 26.

[27]A. Hodge, Outlines, 268.

[28]Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (N.Y.: New York Univ. Press, 1956), 16-17.

almost all churchmen and philanthropists that they even used separate words for the two cases. "Poverty" was used when referring to those who were the virtuous objects of charity; "pauperism" referred to those who were being disciplined or punished for their sin.

It was an ambivalence that the conservatives were never able to resolve. At one and the same time worldly goods were the sign of God's blessing and the result of a belief in a utilitarian pietism. But they were also things to be scorned for a spiritual peace. "Sojourn in the world as travellers," one clergyman advised, "keeping so loose from the world as to be able to pick up and be gone from it on short warning."[29] And, at the same time that poverty was the righteous object for charitable work, it was also the result of immorality. The tragic fault was that the dualism too easily allowed a free choice of either extreme as it fit one's present interest and argument. The result was that the system functioned better as a protection from "sins of luxury and sensuality rather than from evils of injustice and inequality."[30]

It is important to point out here, however, that this was not the purely passive attitude which it appears to be. The conservatives would have been aghast at the suggestion that they were avoiding the social outcry. Rather they were suggesting that man must attack the problem at its very roots if he attack it at all. From their premises, they were pursuing the only active course available: the call to re-union with God. "Conservatism," as Charles Hopkins has noticed, "was

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[29]Central Presbyterian, Oct. 8, 1873.

[30]H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism (Cleveland: World, 1929), 42.

not deaf to the social outcry. Its response was simply that of tradition. It devoted itself to the reformation of the individual, leaving the social consequences to take care of themselves."[31] In the simplest terms, the power of the Gospel in social affairs was not direct; it was, as one conservative argued, "catalytic."[32]

One could legitimately argue, therefore, that it was the very strength of their faith which, paradoxically, led to their ostensibly callous attitude toward social crisis. Their theme and their belief was that righteousness would consistently be rewarded by the natural structure of God's moral order and, supported by the evidence of their own success, they were willing to put their trust in that providential system. Since God controlled all, it was impossible for piety to fail. In fact, failure raised the suspicion of irreligion. As Dwight L. Moody was fond of saying, "I don't see how a man can follow Christ and not be successful."[33]

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[31]Charles Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism (New Haven: Yale, 1940), 16.

[32]Hitchcock, Religious Truth, 227ff.

[33]quoted in William McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism (N.Y.: Ronald, 1959), 253.

DYNAMIC ELEMENTS

By the 1870's, so Charles Cole has insisted, the pre-Civil War evangelists were the "rear-guards of a routed age."[1] They were so because the answers they offered no longer seemed relevant to the questions the social order and its problems demanded. Quite simply, a "new age" had come, with new problems, and a need for new and creative leadership. This fact existed quite independently of the Panic of 1873, but the extra stress which this social catastrophe placed on the clerical order, made its weaknesses and anachronism more evident than they had ever been before.

It can be argued that the theocentric world-view held by the orthodox churchmen had been reasonably well suited to the needs and demands of an earlier and simpler agrarian society. From our view, the key difference between the pre-industrial society and the industrial society of post-Civil War America lies in the form of the challenges which were presented to man. In a rural situation the basic problems can be seen in terms of man versus nature, uncomplicated by the inter-personal rivalries of a more complex society. The more purely agrarian, the greater this individualization of economic energies. That is, in a rural setting each man's (or at least each family's) economic success is determined by his own ability to conquer and control the forces of nature--soil and climate, for instance. The more complex the social structure, the more industrialized or commercialized the society, the more such individualization collapses and economic success

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[1]Charles Cole, The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists (N.Y.: Columbia, 1954),

depends upon market structure, transportation fees and commercial prices.

Pre-Civil War society in America was by no means a purely agrarian society and few persons could claim this independence of interpersonal competition. But still, in contrast to the vastly more complex urbanized and industrialized society which blossomed after the Civil War, it seems legitimate to make a relative distinction in the quality of the two societies. As long as we remember that we are speaking in relative terms, therefore, we can say that in 19th century America there was a trend from an individualized, rural, man-nature competitive situation to a collectivized, urbanized, interpersonal competitive situation.

To the extent that this man-nature situation continued to exist, the theocentric theology of the orthodox continued to seem relevant and plausible. Man was basically competing against seemingly impersonal, unpredictable forces of nature--rain, soil, wind, and insects. In this context, the central message of the church that all of creation was directed by God in accord with his moral purposes offered both comfort and hope. Nature became not only personal but also manageable in terms of man's relationship to God. If the crops were good, it was because God took care of those who served him. If the floods came or a blight destroyed the crop, it was a call to repent, to return to the bounty of the Lord. And there was always the assurance that those who returned would again prosper. It was therefore, in a sense, a rather utilitarian religion, directed at an explanation and control of an otherwise inexplicable and uncontrollable situation. And since social improvement was put in these terms of individualized, personal

piety, it followed that the key implements of the church's work lay in personal revivalism and moral education.

It can even be argued that there was a good deal of pragmatic truth to this interpretation. So long as all things were equal, the righteous (since this was defined as diligence, thrift, and temperance) probably did prosper to a greater extent than the unrighteous. But this is the heart of the problem which developed with the increasing complexity of the social situation. The more complex the social structure, the more dependent man became upon his fellow men, the greater the chance that all things would not be equal, that social complications could indeed break down the link which the conservatives insisted tied piety to success and irreligion to ruin.

In fact, by the 1870's many were decrying an ever decreasing ratio between effort and fulfillment. It had simply become all too evident to anyone at all alert to the warnings, that the major concerns of the nation no longer grew out of an individualized struggle with the forces of God's physical universe. Rather they were intimately collectivized in a man-made social environment. No longer was man's chief struggle with soil, wind, and rain but with factory systems, stock markets, and railroads. It increasingly became the argument of the younger, liberal clergy that there was no guarantee that this system operated upon a moral balance. It was increasingly difficult to believe that the effects of the stock market fell out, as did the rain, in equal measure upon the just and unjust. If a theocentric, providential interpretation of the environemnt had at one time proved meaningful, even useful, a theology which viewed stock markets and factory systems in the same terms became less plausible. Man's activity

and the inherent inequalities of the system were becoming too obvious.

Likewise, the individualized revivalism and moral education which were once the key to social action (when social action needed little extension beyond personal piety) was now woefully inadequate. The key to improving the living conditions of the urban masses now became the ability to understand and handle the social complications which separated effort from fulfillment for many people. This demanded an ability to examine the problems of society on a technical level and a willingness to question the justice of the social structure and institutions themselves, both tasks from which the orthodox tended to be diverted by their theological suppositions

It was an increasing awareness of this gap between explanation and reality which created much of the impetus for a theological reconsideration in the 1870's. Many factors worked to awaken the church to its lack of communication with an increasingly complex social order and the myriad of problems which it faced. There was, for instance, the very evident decline in church attendance among the workers. There were the lessons and problems inherited from their pre-Civil War involvement in charity and city-mission work in what were already complex urban situations. Perhaps most significant from an immediate point of view were the vast social upheavals which followed in the wake of the economic disruptions in the last third of the century.[2]

But it is exceedingly important to stress that a transition from a transcendental to a technical emphasis in the interpretation

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[2]See Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (N.Y.: Harper, 1949).

of social problems could not be effected by a simple awareness of urban needs. This could at best create a recognition that such a change was needed. If the environment urged change, and the Panic of 1873 showed this, the hard fact still was that the conservative consensus could not be replaced until an alternative, an "instead," was developed. Old ideas may well give way to new ideas but seldom to no ideas at all. A theological reconstruction became, therefore, an essential for those persons religiously oriented if they were to develop a meaningful repsonse to the urban-industrial society.

This rethinking and reorientation was impossible without some intellectual thrust from without, that is, without an antithesis to the orthodox moral interpretation. This antithetical position was furnished by the empirical, phenomenal emphasis of positivism. This is not to imply that positivism was a totally new system or that many of the ideas which it presented were not already present, "in the air" so to speak, in the 19th century. Certainly one can see much that is analagous in the rise of secular, technical emphases in the embryonic social sciences, sociological jurisprudence in law, or historicism in history. And most importantly in this context, many or even most of these issues were also being raised by liberal churchmen in the early years of the century and it can be said that without this fertile background positivism would have had little impact indeed.

But still, it can be said that positivist ideas were the most intensive and vigorous empression of secularism in the 1870's and were particularly influential in the rise of a social religion because their major thrust was against those elements of the conservative consensus which were most effective in forming a barrier against creative

church action in social affairs. First, it contained a theory of historical change which served to encourage a willingness to alter theological beliefs. It defined current theological premises as historical rather than absolute truth and connected their removal to its definition of progress. Secondly, it attacked the conservative definition of causation as a providential occurrence. And thirdly, in declaring the noumenal world "unknowable" and therefore irrelevant, it forced its adherents to view phenomena in technical rather than transcendental or moral terms. The end result was a lessening of emphasis upon the transcendence of God and his providential order. Positivism itself was, of course, purely immanent, humanistic, and autonomous. As such, it provided an antithesis to the orthodox consensus.

Positivism

Auguste Comte (1798-1857), like many others of his generation, felt keenly the pangs of transition between the agricultural and the industrial ages in the nineteenth century. Early in his career, he was a follower of Saint Simon, but split from Simonism in 1824 over the revolutionary aspects of that doctrine.[3] He remained convinced, however, that a new ethical and moral structure was necessary for the new industrial age. Drawing from widely diverse sources of Kant, Hume, DeMaistre, Roman Catholicism, and Saint Simon himself, he began to develop his own system--positivism--which he believed would fill this need.

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[3]J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress (London: Macmillan, 1921), 290; Howard Becker and Harry Elmer Barnes, Social Thought from Lore to Science (3rd ed., N.Y.: Dover, 1961), 568.

Comte saw as the basic flaw in the social theories of his day a sharp antipathy between Order and Progress, the former being unfortunately linked to the status quo and the latter to anarchy. Because of this intellectual divisiveness, it had become the sorry state of Western civilization that it could have either order or progress, either the status quo or anarchy, but not both. With his system, Comte promised to unite the two opposites thus enabling civilization to have a dialectical alternative--orderly progress.[4] Both his explanation for the current tension and his suggestions for solutions were developed from his unique view of history.

The history of civilization, Comte postulated, could be told in three successive stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive. The Theological stage had begun in the very earliest of times in the form of fetishism. Man, Comte explained, unable to comprehend the natural events which surrounded him, quite understandably assumed that they acted upon the same basis as he did. He therefore assigned to each and every part of the natural world a soul and a volition much like his own. Eventually, as primitive man became more sophisticated, he gathered these individual fetishes together into a limited number of deities. Thus rather than each plant having its own volition, one goddess personified the entire agricultural world. Among the Greeks and the Romans, this system of polytheism was fully developed into a large pantheon of gods and goddesses, each explaining and controlling its own allotted portion of life. Of course, as time again moved on, this polytheism evolved into monotheism and

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[4]Auguste Comte, The Positive Philosophy (Martineau translation: N.Y.: Blanchard, 1855), 401.

its plurality of gods became generalized into a single supreme god who explained and controlled all the universe.

It was this Judeo-Christian monotheism which Comte credited with the organization of Western society, unifying it under a common set of ideals and a common institution, the medieval church. But monotheism, despite its contribution of order, also contained within it the seeds of anarchy. Under polytheism, Comte explained, the conception of heresy was impossible, but not so under a system of monotheism which postulated a single truth and a single God. The great transition from the unity of the theological age came, therefore, with the Protestant Reformation which "served as the organ of the universal spirit of emancipation, by preparing for the dissolution, intellectual and social, that the old regime must undergo."[5]

The basic flaw of Protestantism, however, was that there was no logical end to the process of negation. Upon the realization that its own revolutionary doctrines were potent ammunition for further revolution, Protestantism abandonned its negative aspect and soon became as opposed to progress as the Roman Church. Had it not been for the emergence of Deism, essentially a non-Christian Protestantism in Comte's opinion, there would have been a total regression. But Deism made it possible for the progress of negation to continue without Protestantism, in fact, quite soon without religion at all.

This transition from the religious anarchy of Protestantism to the secular anarchy of Voltaire, Rousseau, and other Enlightenment philosophers marked the end of the theological age and the beginning

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[5] Ibid., 660.

of the metaphysical which replaced personal gods with impersonal, yet still absolute, forces. This stage, with its stress upon the liberty of conscience, equality, popular sovereignty, and national independence, was, unlike the theological era, essentially progressive and had "superintended ths chief political progress accomplished during the last three centuries."[6] But it was, all told, essentially anarchical, more critical than constructive, and therefore incapable of inventing a new synthetic system for society.

What had happened then was that an irreconcilable antagonism between the theological (order) and the metaphysical (change) had developed. The two ultimately cancelled each other out and created a "stationary doctrine" fixing "society forever [or so it seemed] in a contradictory position between retrogradation and regeneration." This situation "serves to keep in check the other two philosophies and this may be a good: but, on the other hand, it helps to keep them alive; and it is, in so far, an obstacle to reorganization."[7] As a result of this standoff, the 19th century had become a time of moral decline, of intellectual anarchy, of political corruption and incompetence. Before any sort of progress could be made, a third intellectual stage had to effect a satisfactory alternative. "A philosophical unity," Comte declared, "is the first condition of social reorganization."[8]

Comte argued that the problem with both the Theological and the Metaphysical stages was that they tried to explain the cosmos in terms of ultimate causes, personal in the one case and impersonal in the

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[6] Ibid., 406.

[7] Ibid., 419.

[8] Ibid., 788.

other, but nonetheless ultimate. That is, they imposed a transcendental significance upon human events as a way of explaining and understanding their incidence. Comte, however, freely adapting the Kantian distinction between noumena and phenomena, believed that man could never know ultimate causes and was therefore wasting his time and leading himself astray by trying to search for them. All that man could ever know, the only thing of which he could be sure, was the existence of individual phenomena and their relationships to each other.[9] "Cause" therefore became not a "being" as it was for the theological and metaphysical conservatives because such, if it existed at all, was unknowable and therefore a useless concept. Rather, the positivists thought of cause in terms of time sequence: x caused y if it invariably preceded y. There was no concept of x being a power but merely something precedent. The concept of an ultimate causal order or "providence" was simply incredible to Comte, a mere sophisticated "fate," as he called it.[10] All man could know, he repeated, were "coexistences and sequences of phenomena."[12]

Comte was still certain, however, that there was a unity within the coexistence of phenomena. From man's point of view, the key to this world of natural law (defined as the pattern of phenomena and not as divine order) was the essential unity of the human race. This unity became for Comte his absolute and therefore his "god." From this worship of collective humanity (since man could know nothing

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[9] Ibid., 28.

[10] Ibid., 596.

[11] quoted by Luther and Jessie Barnard, Origins of American Sociology (N.Y.: Crowell, 1943), 678.

higher) came the axiom of Comte's ethics: "Live for Others." A humanistic altruism (Comte coined the word) became the highest human act. Concommitantly, man's most significant task became to "secure the gradual predominance of sociability over personality, whereas personality is naturally predominant."[12]

From the context of our problem, what such a positivistic system did was to force man to view events in phenomenal rather than in moral or pietistic terms. There simply was no vertical, no transcendental dimension at all. It was impossible to conceive of anything except in a relative position and to conceive of it as relative to an unknowable ultimate was not to know it at all. The Comtian system, therefore, admitted nothing transcendental. It was a true, autonomous secularism since it found its ultimate within the worldly context and its god in the human and phenomenal rather than in the noumenal. It admitted no first principles and therefore encouraged a greater reliance on a inductive estimation of the natural and social environment in technical terms.

The direct influence of Comte's works in the United States is difficult to judge. It did attract some attention just before the Civil War when his basic work Cours de philosophie positive (six volumes published between 1830 and 1842) appeared in an abridged translation prepared by Harriet Martineau in 1852. A few, therefore, knew and read Comte firsthand. Comtian ideas were also disseminated to a limited extent by Henry Edger, Comte's appointed disciple, through the journal Modern Thought. But if the direct influence was slight,

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[12]Auguste Comte, The Catechism of Positive Religion (3rd ed., London: Kegan, 1891), 38.

there was a significant entry of positivist ideas into the United States through the works of two popular writers, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer.[13]

Most Americans first became acquainted with Positivism by way of Mill's little volume The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte, first published in 1865.[14] Mill and Comte corresponded for some years and shared many ideas together before the two drifted apart, Mill being unable to reconcile himself with the extremes of the Comtian system.[15]

Regardless of these disagreements on some of the ultimate implications of Comte's positivism, Mill did accept all of the basic features of Comte's positivist method and it was his exposition of these in his System of Logic (1855) and his criticism of the theological doctrines of providence in their light which makes him significant as a popularizer of Comte and as a dynamic force in the theistic

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[13]See Robert E. Schneider, Positivism in the United States: The Apostleship of Henry Edger (Rosario, Argentina, 1946) and Henry Edgar, The Positive Calendar (Modern Times, N.Y.: 1856). Also interested in positivism was Philadelphian Horace Binney Wallace who gave Comte a pension of 500 francs per year (Dorfman, Economic Mind, II, 70). To some extent, George Opdyke (Treatise on Political Economy, New York, 1851) and Chauncey Wright (Philosophical Discussions, New York, 1877) were also interested in pure positivism. Charles F. Adams, Jr., noted in his Autobiography (Boston, 1916) that "when in England in November, 1865, shortly before my marriage, I one day chanced upon a copy of John Stuart Mill's essay on Auguste Comte, at the time just published. My intellectual faculties had then been lying fallow for nearly four years, and I was in a most recipient condition; and that essay of Mill's revolutionized in a single morning my whole mental attitude. I emerged from the theological stage, in which I had been nurtured, and passed into the scientific. I had up to that time never heard of Darwin, Inter arma, etc. From reading that compact little volume of Mill's at Brighton in November, 1865, I date a changed intellectual and moral being." (p. 179).

[14]John Stuart Mill, The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte (N.Y.: Holt, 1865).

[15]W. M. Simon, European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century (Ithaca: Cornell, 1963), 177-201.

reconciliation of the mid-19th century.

If Noah Porter's work was the standard explanation of the conservative view of causation, then Mill's work was the key to the secular view. Mill agreed with Comte that ultimates were unknowable. In his Logic he stated: "I premise, then, that when in the course of this inquiry I speak of the cause of any phenomenon; I do not mean a cause which is not itself a phenomenon; I make no research into the ultimate, or ontological cause of anything."[16] Mill could be so unconcerned with ontology because like Comte he denied the possibility of knowing such a cause even if it should exist. For Mill, cause was synonymous with "invariable and unconditional sequence." The positive law of causation simply stated was this: "for every event, there exists some combination of objects or events, some given concurrence of circumstances, positive and negative, the occurence of which will always be followed by that phenomenon."[17]

The refusal to recognize any concept of causation beyond that of time sequence had obvious implications for the theological doctrine of Providence. Quite simply, for Mill, "the notion of a Providential government by an omnipotent Being for the good of his creatures must be entirely dismissed."[18] Not only was it bad logic but it seemed inconsistent with what Mill saw as the actual condition of the world. If God controlled all, then how was man to explain the evident existence of evil in the world? There were only two choices. Either

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[16]John Stuart Mill, System of Logic (N.Y.: Harper, 1855), 196.

[17]Ibid., 197.

[18]John Stuart Mill, Three Essays on Religion (N.Y.: Holt, 1874), 243.

God was "not all powerful or he is not good."[19] To Mill, the conservative argument that evil tended to good was no answer. Was he to worship a God who was unable to bring about good except by the use of evil (or worse still, enjoyed using evil for good?) Not only was such a theory illogical, but it also held for Mill certain practical problems. If one actually believed that natural evils were sent by God to accomplish some wise purpose, then "every thing done by mankind which tends to chain up these natural agencies or to restrict their mischievous operation . . . ought to be accounted impious."[20] This, of course, much to Mill's chagrin, was very much the position of many conservative theologians toward social catastrophes like the Panic of 1873. But it was arguments from men like Mill which began to point out the difficulty that lay in store if such cosmic views were carried out to their logical extremes. Quite simply, Mill pointed out, they would prohibit everything "from the draining of a pestilential marsh down to curing the toothache, or putting up an umbrella."[21]

The only way for the theologians to escape this dilemma, Mill concluded, was to re-evaluate the conception of God as a being who held everything under providential control. "The only admissable moral theory of Creation," Mill concluded, "is that the Principle of Good cannot at once and altogether subdue the powers of evil, either physical or moral."[22] Mill, if forced to choose between a God imperfectly

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[19] John Stuart Mill, Letters, (ed. by Hugh S. R. Elliot) (London: Longmans, 1910), II, 63-64.

[20] Mill, Essays, 32-33.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 38-39.

in goodness and a God limited in his power, would chose the latter. If there were a God, he said, it would be

> a Being of great but limited power, how or by what limited we cannot even conjecture; of great and perhaps unlimited intelligence, but perhaps, also, more narrowly limited than his power: who desires, and pays some regard to his creatures, but who seems to have other motives of action which he cares more for, and who can hardly be supposed to have created the universe for that purpose alone. 23

But man could never know for certain if God was or was not. The only "rational attitude of a thinking mind" who realized he could never know more than the relationships of phenomena around him, was that of skepticism, "as distinguished from belief on the one hand, and from atheism on the other."[24]

It was Herbert Spencer, however, who more than Mill was to contribute toward the development of sociological thought and a constructive application of positivist method to the theological sphere. Comtian positivism was, epistimologically, predicated upon the dualism of the relatively knowable and the absolutely unknowable, of phenomena and noumena. It was Spencer who first tried to interpret the "unknowable" in Comte's system into the language of the theologian. In the process he did much to articulate a positivist view of the nature of God which could serve as an antithesis to the conservative deity in the future attempt to grasp a new theological synthesis.

Spencer accepted the basic Comtian explanation for the development of man's ideas on God. Primitive man, he said, had been faced with the problem of conceptualizing his universe. Unable to explain

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[23] Ibid., 194-195.

[24] Ibid., 242.

much of it in purely natural terms, he created supernatural explanations to fill these gaps in his yet undeveloped scientific knowledge. This was the common force behind all religions: "the omnipresence of something which passes comprehension."[25] All religion began with such a mystery, then proceeded to explain it and therefore to negate it. That "explanation" which primitive man used to fill the gaps in his worldly knowledge, once anthropomorphized, became his God. God, in this scheme, became as large as man's knowledge was small.

But man grew in secular scientific knowledge, and as he did so, the gaps which needed filling became smaller and fewer. Thus, his God also became smaller. Man now understood cholera epidemics and Spencer asserted that anyone who still persisted in seeing them as the "consequent of the omission of Dei Gratia from an issue of coins" should be, and likely would be, committed as a lunatic.[26] But there was much that man still could not explain within the environment, especially within his social environment, and in these areas, he still clung to the divine explanation as a crutch. It was because of this relationship between deity and ignorance that religion had felt itself drawn into a battle with science, since with its every step, science seemed to be chopping away the God which man had constructed. But now, Spencer was arguing that scientific discovery, rather than destroying religion, was in reality "purifying" it of its non-religious elements.

Following his Comtian form, Spencer argued that there were essentially two realms: one Unknowable and one Knowable (although at

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[25]Herbert Spencer, First Principles of a New System of Philosophy (2nd ed.: N.Y.: Appleton, 1870), 45.

[26]Herbert Spencer, Social Statics (London: Chapman, 1851), 22.

a given historical period, part of this latter may be unknown, but never unknowable). What man had done, Spencer saw, was to include the unknown part of the Knowable along with the ultimately Unknowable in his concept of God when only the Unknowable was the true province of theology. Progress consisted therefore of the fruitful separation of religion's unknowable realm from science's knowable one. Once this had happened, religion would have its true concept of God, not as a contrived explanation of man's weakness, but as the truly Absolute and truly "inscrutable Power."

As Spencer realized, however, most of the orthodox were not going to be anxious to exchange their known providential God for an Inscrutable Power which was not only Unknown but also Unknowable. "You offer us," he imagines the orthodox leaders complaining, "an unthinkable abstraction in place of a Being towards whom we may entertain definite feelings. Though we are told that this Absolute is real, yet since we are not allowed to conceive it, it might as well be a pure negation. Instead of a Power which we can regard as having some sympathy with us, you would have us contemplate a Power to which no emotion whatever can be ascribed. And so we are to be deprived of the very substance of our faith."[27]

Spencer could even sympathize with their plight; certainly, he admitted, any attempt to conceive of a God who was so different from man as not to be able to be bribed, and cajoled by burnt offerings and good works would appear to be hard and unfeeling. More importantly, he admitted, the removal of God from the realm of the intelligible, forced man to order his actions solely by evaluating their consequences

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[27]Spencer, First Principles, 113-114.

in the surrounding world. That is, he had to be content with a technical explanation of his environment. For many, this was a very difficult task, perhaps even too difficult. "To see clearly how a right or wrong act generates consequences, internal and external, that go branching out more widely as years progress, requires a rare power of analysis."[28] Spencer could, therefore, at times agree that "vividly depicted future torments and future joys--pains and pleasures of a definite kind, produced in a manner direct and simple enough to be clearly imagined" could serve a useful function and even be the most suitable form of belief for the person who held it, although it was not absolutely and universally the best.[29] Why? Because the orthodox conception of the deity was simply a sign of intellectual immaturity, the result of man's inability or unwillingness to approach and understand his environment on its own technical level. A moral interpretation of a social crisis, then, was the result of man's lack of a technical understanding of it. "At the present time," Spencer argued, "the refusal to abandon a relatively concrete notion for a relatively abstract one, implies the inability to frame the relatively abstract one: and so proves that the change would be premature and injurious."[30]

Thus Spencer, evolutionist that he was, could urge a tolerant consideration of conservative theological beliefs. "Though from the higher perception they hide the abstract verity within them," he claimed, "yet to lower perceptions they render this verity more appreciable than it would otherwise be. They serve to make real and

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[28] Ibid., 117.

[29] Ibid., 115-117.

[30] Ibid., 115-116, 118-119.

influential over men, that which else /might/ be unreal and uninfluential. Or we may call them protective envelopes without which the contained truth would die."[31]

But, after all this has been said, it must be emphasized that Spencer's understanding of the conservative mind did not mean that the anthropomorphic concept of God should not be challenged. It must be. Although when it was first conceived, it was well adapted to the times and people, times and people are constantly changing and so must religion change and evolve else it will be imperfectly adapted to its actual situation. It was therefore necessary in Spencer's opinion that some enlightened men must of necessity forge ahead and be constantly challenging the status quo, constantly providing a dynamic dimension to the intellectual situation.[32]

It was precisely this function which Comte, Mill, and especially Spencer himself performed. Together they introduced new elements and effected challenges to long-assumed theological theses which made it possible and even encouraged theologians to reevaluate their essential beliefs. Foremost among their contributions was a historical explanation of the current theological doctrines as simply historical truth rather than abstract, eternal truth. And, at the same time, they challenged the orthodox churchmen's theocentric moral interpretation of human events and encouraged the substitution of a technical, man-centered analysis. Whether this took the form of Comte's formal worship of humanity, Mill's informal humanism, or Spencer's theistic worship of the Unknown, it turned man's attention away from the

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[31] Ibid., 121.

[32] Ibid.

transcendent and towards the human condition and the immanence of God.[33]

American Judicious Conservatism

In the last analysis, however, the positivism of Comte, Mill, and Spencer was basically a secular philosophy. Before it could be of any value to the church in adapting its theology to the needs of the industrial age, there had to be theologians who were willing and open enough to read and study the system and relate it to their particular problem. As we shall see later, the staunch conservatives were by no means willing to do this. Their only concern with positivism was as an object for their polemic attacks against materialism. But there were others, we shall call them judicious conservatives, who were willing to examine positivism fairly and to use some of its criticisms as a basis for reexamining their own positions. These men, to be sure, held most of the typical conservative beliefs, but they would eventually become more important for those orthodox elements which they questioned or even ignored. It is difficult to underestimate the importance of this group because it was only the eventual triumph of their flexibility which permitted the growth of liberal ideas in the latter third of the 19th century.

One of these judicious conservatives was Albert Barnes (1798-1870), the New School Presbyterian minister who for forty years

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[33]See J. M. Robertson, A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century (London: Watts, 1929), 404, 344; also V. L. Parrington, Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1930), 191; L. E. Elliot-Binns, English Thought, 1860-1900: The Theological Aspect (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury, 1956), 65, 67. See also an excellent bibliography on European positivism in Simon, European Positivism, 238-376.

occupied the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Barnes, in his Ely Lectures (published in 1868 as Evidences of Christianity) expounded some of the progressive views which had long made him a target of his generally conservative colleagues in the Presbyterian ministry.[34]

In his lectures, Barnes proceeded to examine the state of the Christian faith in the light of mid-century attacks from scientific thought. In his estimation, no ultimate conflict was possible between science and religion. Both sought the truth: one, to be sure, scientifically discoverable truth and the other revealed truth, but upon finding this truth, their results would be at least compatible since "truth" was unitary. Any conflict which might exist was due to the inclusion of error in one or the other. This was precisely what Barnes asserted had occurred and now occasioned the friction. True and pure Christianity, he declared, was a "fixed and unchanging system."[35] But the current religious beliefs were a different case. The fact was that over the ages a vast amount of error had entangled itself within this unchanging core. "A great part of the work of the Church in modern times," he further stated, "has been to detach from it the errors and corruptions which it had accumulated in the long period of its history."[36]

Barnes, who was acquainted with Comte through the work of John

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[34]Barnes was tried for heresy in 1836 on the basis of his sermon "The Way of Salvation" and was a point of great tension in the troubled years of the 1830's which finally led to a schism within the Presbyterian Church in 1837.

[35]Albert Barnes, Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity in the Nineteenth Century (N.Y.: Harper, 1868), 350.

[36]Ibid., 355.

Stuart Mill, accepted a modified positivist explanation of how this falsity had insinuated itself within the Christian doctrine. In times past, he noted, "faith in the miraculous and the marvelous was then the normal state of belief. All that could not be explained on natural principles--and there were as yet few things that could be thus explained--was supposed to be the result of supernatural intervention."[37] But now, of course, science had explained much and "it requires some boldness in a man who wishes to stand well in the scientific world to avow his beliefs in the events of this kind [the miraculous--he is speaking specifically of Genesis 1-4] recorded in the Bible."[38] The best that man could do was to opt for an allegorical interpretation of the Bible or to affirm that the Bible was only inspired on spiritual matters and not on scientific ones.[39] Certainly the church could not deny the validity of the facts which had been justly proved by science. He warned that

> the religious part of the world must make up its mind to accept all the disclosures of true Science, however they impinge on its articles of faith. If the facts of Science are hopelessly irreconcilable with the statements of the Bible, but one result can follow. The Bible will be abandoned. 40

Barnes, of course, was confident that nothing significant would ever be removed from Biblical religion. What would go were those things once supposed to be revelation--Barnes used the word

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[37] Ibid., 79.

[38] Ibid., 80-81.

[39] This latter view was Barnes' own position. See ibid., 17-18: "God does not give special revelation on those subjects which are quite within the range of human knowledge."

[40] Ibid., 86.

myth to describe them--but now exposed by science to be fraudulent. For every such exposure, he for one was happy to join the skeptic in gleeful celebration.[41] But Barnes and the skeptic would have differed in the basic point that the latter saw a day when science would reign over all knowledge while Barnes saw two co-equal spheres of knowledge--the first natural and scientific, the second intuitive and revealed. This second branch remained forever beyond the scope of science. Barnes' concern, and a legitimate one, was that as science killed the myths and worked at purifying religion from the false and non-essential, man would become so suspicious of anything "non-scientific" that it would be automatically disbelieved as a myth yet to be displaced.[42] No intelligent person, he concluded, could deny the validity of this process of demythologizing. How far it should go was the real question. "Here is to be the battle ground of this generation."[43]

James McCosh, president of Princeton College from 1868 to 1888 and the foremost American authority on Scottish common sense philosophy, was also interested in the type of questions which Barnes was raising. McCosh, who had been born in Scotland in 1811, made his reputation as Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at Belfast, earning his chair on the merits of his 1850 work The Method of Divine Government, Physical and Moral. Possessed of a keen mind and widely read, he was probably the best prepared of all the American theologians to deal with the highly complex intellectual problems involved in the confrontation of Comtism

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[41] Ibid., 100.

[42] Ibid., 102.

[43] Ibid., 107.

and theology. He was a student of Hamilton's at Edinburgh, but found himself closer to Reid and intuitionism. His emphasis on intuitional knowledge quite naturally brought him into conflict with the positivists, especially Mill. His pre-supposition of a moral intuition lay at the heart of his theology and to his mind, provided along with revelation the capacity to obtain knowledge of ultimate principles. McCosh was especially harsh on Spencer's definition of God as "unknowable." In his brief critique of Spencer's work, he noted Spencer's generous abandonment of the unknown to religion and wryly quipped, "I am not inclined to accept the gift he so graciously offers, as I do not and cannot know what it is."[44]

McCosh, then, differed from the positivists by his assertion that it was possible to know God. "True," he admitted, "we do not know all about God. We know, after all, only a part; but, 'we know in part.'"[45] This was, of course, a major distinction between the two, but nonetheless, in the course of his critical exchanges with Mill and Spencer, McCosh became well aware of the precarious nature of some of the orthodox doctrines vis a vis positivism and himself moved to a more moderate position.

This was especially true of his Divine Government, in which he dealt with the relationship of the deity to phenomenal events. McCosh, well aware of the uneasiness the advance of scientific knowledge was creating in clerical circles, was interested in reexamining the pre-

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[44]James McCosh, Herbert Spencer's Philosophy as Accumulated in his Ethics (N.Y.: Scribner, 1885), 14.

[45]James McCosh, Christianity and Positivism (N.Y.: Carter, 1871), 147.

vailing doctrines of providence. In fact, he agreed with the positivists that man had all too often built his concept of God and providence to fill up whatever extended beyond his own knowledge.

> An ignorant man can discover no physical cause of an occurrence and so he must attribute it to God; but another man has detected a producing cause in nature, and so needs to take no notice of a higher power. According to this system, an event is ascribed in one age to God, and in a more advanced age to nature. It follows that ignorant countries must be the most pious, and that enlightened nations are necessitated to be infidel in proportion to their progress in science. Religion, or rather superstition, is not aware how efficiently it is playing into the hands of atheism by the sanction which it gives to such a principle--a principle which would make man's religion decrease as his knowledge of physical nature is augmented. Yet it is this narrow and superstitious sentiment which produces all that jealousy of the discovery of law, which is still so common among those who profess to be religious. The jealousies which they entertain, and the principles which they lay down, furnish the infidel with the only plausible argument which he can use in his attempt to banish God from his works. 46

McCosh was quite worried about this type of God. He realized that in human terms the measure of one's theology lay in his estimation of God's relation to his creation. It was this which determined how man was to act. Yet the dilemma was not easily solved. Certainly if the prevailing view of God's providence as that which explained what man could not otherwise explain, was preserved, then God, one way or another, would continue to shrink before man's scientific advances until he was no longer significant. If, on the one hand, clergymen conceded point after point to science without providing or at least

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[46]James McCosh, The Method of Divine Government, Physical and Moral (N.Y.: Carter, 1869), 191. (first edition published 1850).

attempting a theistic alternative, they would soon find themselves holding nothing but Spencer's Unknown in their hands. Yet on the other hand, if they remained adamant and insisted in spite of all scientific knowledge that epidemics, panics, famines, and social conditions like poverty were best explained in moral, theocentric terms, they then ran the risk of appearing terribly ludicrous and irrelevant to that increasing number of persons who could very well explain these things in purely natural terms. Neither alternative was very attractive.

More significantly, McCosh also put forth constructive suggestions which would be of use in the theological reconsiderations of the last quarter of the century.. One of the suggestions which he raised was a revision of the prevailing providential theory. Most conservatives, he pointed out, saw two types of providence--general, where God worked indirectly by laws, and specific, where God worked directly to achieve his goals. In its stead, McCosh proposed a single "universal providence" in which God controlled everything by universal, natural laws. The old view, he warned, was apt to get the church into trouble. This admitted dualism, although not intended to do so, too easily slipped into a reading of general providence as that which man could explain naturally (and therefore needed attach no transcendental significance) and the particular as what man could not explain as well and therefore was forced to rely on a supernatural explanation. McCosh suggested that the church refuse to make this distinction at all. God's system, he argued, was a single unit; God always worked by laws and our discovery of some laws did not decrease the divine responsibility for the action. It was the only way, McCoosh urged, to visualize God and his universe unless man would see God only when it was con-

venient. He saw something beautiful in the simple peasant who says rain comes from God. Certainly modern man knew that rain was caused by laws of air, water, and electricity, but in his own way, McCosh was certain that the peasant "is the more enlightened of the two."[47] There was but one system, and our understanding of it in natural terms should not decrease our appreciation of God's presence. Nor should we fear any damage to our religion by exploring it further.

McCosh's attempt to stress the unity of God's government and to reduce the apparent conflict between scientific advances and the stability of theology, found considerable support from the pen of Horace Bushnell (1802-1876). Although less erudite then McCosh, Bushnell's works were more widely read and one suspects more influential. He also argued for an essential unity within the system of God. The "natural" and the "supernatural" were one. This emphasis upon the "rigid unity of the system of God" was the theme of his Nature and the Supernatural as Together Constituting One System of God (1858).[48] Unlike McCosh, Bushnell did continue to use the words natural and supernatural, meaning by them two equal parts of God's larger system. Nature was "that created realm of being or substance which has an acting, a going on or process within itself, under and by its own laws, [that is] . . . as if the laws, the powers, the actings were inherent. . . ."[49] By the supernatural, he meant the actings of of separate forces--namely God and man--which were "under no law of

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[47] Ibid., 185, 186-190.

[48] Horace Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural (N.Y.: Scribner, 1872), 31.

[49] Ibid., 36-37.

cause and effect in /their/ choices. . . ." They were the work of "original powers."[50]

Bushnell was careful to avoid, more so than McCosh, the pantheistic tendency of identifying God with nature.[51] He was adamant in insisting that there were two realms, natural and supernatural, each a sub-part of God's whole--a concept which at the same time led him dangerously close to the very predicament against which McCosh warned and found him predicating his supernatural almost as much on human weakness as upon divine strength. The saving feature, however, in Bushnell's synthesis was his assertion that even supernatural action comes within nature's laws.[52] "Accordingly every result produced in this manner, whether by God or by man, represents nature supernaturally acted on, not nature overturned."[53] This was absolutely necessary, he claimed, "for if nature were to be violated and tossed about by capricious overturnings of her laws, there would be an end to all confidence and exact intelligence."[54] This was the point soundly struck. Only a concept of God which enabled man to treat nature as a unity and at least "as if the laws, the powers, the actings were inherent" could enable man to act at all.

These arguments of McCosh and Bushnell were not fully developed but their stress upon the continuity of nature and God's system had implications beyond their immediate vision. The key point is that

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[50] Ibid., 50-51.

[51] Ibid., 91.

[52] Ibid., 250.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 257.

they were, by the use of modified positivist thinking, or at least arguments similar to positivism, rethinking their understanding of the nature of God and his relationship to human events. McCosh's hope was that a belief in a "universal providence" would protect the Church's kerygmatic theology in the face of scientific advance. Bushnell attempted to do the same thing by revising rather than discarding the conservative dualism. Both hoped that it would no longer be necessary for the church to look so skeptically at scientific progress, Man could therefore act scientifically upon his technical knowledge of worldly things without destroying his God. The supernatural would not necessarily suffer by the advance of the natural since, in fact, the supernatural and the natural were one for McCosh and two parts of the same whole for Bushnell. What they were attempting to do was to reach an understanding of how a concept of God could survive in the face of man's increasing technical knowledge about the functioning of his environment. It was only by the eventual triumph of this type of thinking that there could be an accomodation between orthodoxy and the sciences. That was to be the contribution of these men--and a considerable one it was--to the growth of liberal thought later in the century.

Early American Liberalism

A second important group within the American theological panorama of the pre-Civil War era, both as critics and constructive thinkers, were some of the clergy who occupied the left wing of American Protestantism. They were men who stood outside the normal orthodox consensus, but much of their writing was addressed to its problems and was a major influence upon the post-Civil War generation.

One of these clergymen was James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888), a well-read Transcendentalist who was responsible for trying to sift some of the benefits of German idealism into the American theological mixture. Especially influential was his book Orthodoxy: Its Truths and Errors, written in 1866. It showed the influence of post-Kantian thinkers like Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel as well as Germany's brilliantly creative theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. The book's greatest contribution to the issue we are discussing was to sort out the distinctions between positivism and orthodoxy and then to suggest some aspects of progressive German thought as an alternative.

By orthodoxy, Clarke meant the principle that there is only one view of the faith, that this view is known and held by the majority of Christians, and that its belief is essential to salvation.[55] It was this spirit of dogmatism which Clarke branded as the basic flaw in orthodoxy. It was, he claimed, the old error of gnosticism which must give way to a more flexible theological outlook:

> Undoubtedly there is only one faith, but there may be many ways of stating it in the form of opinion. Moreover, no man, no church, no age, sees the whole truth. Truth is multilateral, but men's minds are unilateral. They are mirrors which reflect and that imperfectly, the side of the object which is towards them. 56

Clarke was fond of recalling St. Paul's words that "we know in part." This was nothing, he claimed, but the same thing which Kant, Comte, Mansel, Mill, and Spencer were saying. But if Clarke commended the relativists as an antithesis to the gnostic error of orthodoxy, he

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[55]James Freeman Clarke, Orthodoxy: Its Truths and Errors (Boston, 1867), 19-20.

[56]Ibid., 23.

was not willing to accept their views in an unqualified manner. For in fact, many of them went to the opposite extreme of allowing no knowledge of God.[57] This, even Clarke could not admit and saw in German idealism the hope of a theological middle ground.

Clarke saw four steps to the creation of a theological system. First, man knows God by faith, an "intuitive looking," as he explained it. He then reflects upon this intuition and brings it to consciousness; this is knowledge. Thirdly, he arranges the products of this into a systematic form which is belief. Lastly, he forms opinions about these beliefs which are not necessarily identical to the "thing in itself" with which the man began. The flaw of the orthodox was to confound the opinion with the reality and thereby to worship a human intellectual creation rather than God himself.[58]

The result of this confusion had been the separation of God from his creation and the belief in a God totally outside life, acting occasionally to suspend or violate the natural order of things. Clarke was especially impatient with those "judicious supernaturalists" like Bushnell who sat halfway between orthodoxy and a more liberal position. Clarke complained that they might say that they saw God in nature, but in practice, they only conceived of a God beyond. Bushnell, he charged, was particularly inconsistent because he claimed to see God as a supernatural being working on nature which was also divine. Therefore he ended up with God overturning God.[59] But regardless of these differ-

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[57] Ibid., 25.

[58] Ibid., 37-38. Clarke equates the word "faith" with the transcendental use of "intuition," Coleridge's "reason," and Schelling's "Anschauungs-vermogen."

[59] Ibid., 49-50.

ences, Clarke and the judicious conservatives were essentially delving into the same problems. Both raised the possibility of the existence of error within the conservative synthesis and both saw the source of this in the epistemological position of the orthodox. And such suggestions and inquiries were ultimately to be useful in reconciling the basic epistemological differences between orthodoxy and positivism.

Somewhat more influential than Clarke as a liberal critic of the orthodox theological system and as a transmitter of German thought was the Unitarian Theodore Parker (1810-1860). Parker was an acitvist who quite early became dissatisfied with the conservative theory of reform. It was evident to him that social problems were to a great extent human problems. Instead, he found the church viewing them, not in a technical manner, but in moral platitudes. The result, he complained, was that the "Churches are busy with their Theology and their ritual, and cannot attend much to these great humane movements; they must appease the 'wrath of God,' or baptize men's bodies with water and their minds with wind." Surely, he thought, "there must be a better form of religion."[60]

After much thought, Parker concluded that the real difficulty lay deep within the conservative theology. He was convinced that the "Idea which a man forms of God is always the most important element in his speculative theory of the universe, and in his particular, practical plan of action for the Church, the state, the community, the family, and his own individual life."[61] That is, what Parker

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[60]Theodore Parker, Sermons of Theism, Atheism, and Popular Theology (Boston: Little, Brown, 1853), lxiii.

[61]Ibid., 3.

believed to be an unsatisfactory social orientation had to be the result of an insufficient or erroneous idea of God.

In his Sermons of Theism, Atheism, and Popular Theology, published in 1853, Parker set out to evaluate various concepts of God, hoping to find some basis for improvement. In his study he was always careful to examine what man did as well as what man said since the two, he was convinced, were not always identical. There was, for instance, a theoretical atheism which denied God in terms but quite often, as in the case of John Stuart Mill, acted upon assumptions which were essentially theistic. Others, and these sorely tried Parker's patience, professed faith but acted as if they had none.[62] "There is a great deal of social, practical atheism which appears under the guise and with the name of religion. This is the most ghastly, the most deadly kind: the more consistent atheist will join the church."[63]

Parker believed that the problem of practical atheism ran deeper than mere hypocrisy. Such men had a false conception of God, a God which they could turn on or off at pleasure. They were essentially sincere in what beliefs they had, but the beliefs were such that they could still act on the premise that "Business is for the week and religion for Sunday."[64] This, Parker saw, was the current sad state of "Popular Theology," the current reigning system of orthodox belief. The crux of the difficulty was their conception of God as "finite and imperfect." Of course, "it is not said so in words;

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[62] Ibid., 43.

[63] Ibid., 70.

[64] Ibid., 71.

the contrary is often said; nevertheless it is so."[65]

What was the finite God of Popular Theology like? God was perceived as distinct from the universe, working not by laws (that is a "constant mode of operation") but by haphazard intervention. So the theologians had devised two sets of operations in the universe. "One is the 'work of Nature' by means of law--a constant mode of operation of a constant force; the other is the 'work of Grace' by means of miracles."[66] The result was that man had to grovel before his God, appease him, bribe him, so that God's capricious action would be favorable. "This theology makes man a worm;" Parker concluded, "religion a torment to all but ten in a million; immortality a curse to mankind; God a devil omnipotent to damn, and his rule in time and eternity the most selfish despotism which the world ever knew."[67]

Most dangerous to Parker was the implication of the Popular Theology in terms of social action. It tended to put a premium on piety rather than action. When asked to fight wickedness, the conservatives merely cried out "Save us, good Lord," or when asked to favor a good cause all they could say was "Miserable Offenders, Save us, Good Lord."[68] To Parker this was a most vicious blasphemy. Man absolved himself from social responsibility by arguing that God controlled all according to his good purposes. And since all worked to the good for those who loved God, the church's emphasis turned to

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[65] Ibid., 100.

[66] Ibid., 105-106.

[67] Ibid., 165.

[68] Ibid., 71-72.

encouraging piety. Parker charged these men were merely asking God to do what they cared no to do. Regardless of their rhetoric to the contrary, this God existed only to serve man. It was all quite preposterous to Parker. The real situation was very plain:

> If a nation does not work, or works wrong,--brewing its corn into beer, not baking it into bread, producing rum and tobacco, not houses and cloth; if it applies to a wrong purpose its sea-chariots, or land chariots, will build forts and not cities, breed soldiers and 'nobles' not farmers and mechanics,--loaf-consumers, or destroyers of loaves, not loaf-makers--has the nation a right to complain against God for its want of bread? Or when complaining with many prayers, shall God send a miracle to feed the men, and not leave them to hunger til their own hands stop their mouth? If half the people are left uncared for by the powerful class and turn out badly, steal, rob, murder, knowing no better, have the men who have been careless a right to complain at the result? 69

Clearly social ills and catastrophes were the result of man's mismanagement. The conservatives, of course, would also have seen man's sin as the source of social ills, but Parker's analysis lacked the conservative conviction that these evils were somehow working to the benefit of man in accord with a higher system. If there was to be any improvement it would come from human effort and nothing else. "If God give adequate intellect at first, is He to supersede the necessity of using it? What a Providence that would be, at cross purposes with itself."[70]

Such was Parker's reaction to the orthodox cosmic view. But he was not totally pessimistic in his evaluation of the theological

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[69] Ibid., 349.

[70] Ibid., 347.

scene. Instead, he saw a light, a way out of the theological dilemma into which orthodoxy had fallen. Religion, in Parker's opinion, was evolutionary. In a semi-positivistic fashion, he saw a progression from the "savage's rude Fetishism" to "patriarchal Deism" to "Mosaic worship of Jehoval" to Christianity. And, of course, Christianity itself was evolutionary.[71] Therefore, Parker could say optimistically that "you and I, my friends, live in an age when mankind has outgrown the popular theology. God be thanked."[72]

Parker foresaw a new synthesis evolving which he called "Theism" (as distinguished from "Atheism, the denial of God; from Popular Theology, which affirms a finite ferocious God; and from Deism which affirms a finite God without ferocity.")[73] The most important characteristic of the God of the new Theism was his infinity. As such, he had qualities which were unknowable by man since man, being finite, could by definition never really grasp the infinite. Man's aim, therefore, was a conception of God which, since it could not be "all of God," was at least "all God."[74] God was different in kind from the universe, that is, from both the world of matter and also from the Spirit or world of man. But yet "God must include both, matter and spirit."[75] The man who saw God as only natural or as only spiritual had a finite God, limited by the growth of matter and spirit and

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[71] Ibid., 68.

[72] Ibid., 167.

[73] Ibid., 171.

[74] Ibid., 173.

[75] Ibid., 174.

therefore variable with them.[76] Parker believed that God must be infinite and total, therefore unitary in Providence and action:

> If God be Infinite, then he must be immanent, perfectly and totally present in Nature and in Spirit. Thus there is no point of space, no atom of matter, but God is there; no point of spirit and no atom of soul, but God is there. And yet finite matter and finite spirit do not exhaust God. He transcends the world of matter and of spirit; and in virtue of that transcendence continually makes the world of matter fairer, and the world of spirit wiser. So there is really a progress in the manifestation of God, not a progress in God the manifesting. 77

The basic criticism, then, which these liberals directed against the orthodox theology was that it placed an over-emphasis upon the transcendence of God. This tended, so they charged, to make God finite, something supernatural set over and against the natural. This further tended toward a dualistic world-view with the mundane affairs of mankind distinct from God yet under his providential control. This gave religion a rather self-serving, utilitarian slant. In fact, some claimed, this God was really man's invention to afford control of his environment by satisfying a pietistic creed. This was the result, they said, of emphasizing God's control at the expense of his presence.

We should note here, parenthetically, that these men used several words almost interchangeably in their polemic writings to identify their criticisms against the orthodox deity. This God was, for instance, "finite" because he reflected only the transcendence of God rather than his totality. He was also "finite" because he

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[76] Ibid., 174-175.

[77] Ibid., 176-177.

was predicated on man's needs, specifically upon those things man could not explain by technical terms. Also, because he was constructed in man's image, able to be cajoled and bargained with, he was termed "anthropomorphic" and less frequently "personal." And, because the liberals contrasted this deity to the unknowable infinity of Spencer's God, he was at times described, again prejoratively, as a "known" God. We raise this matter here as a caution because in a larger sense anthropomorphic, personal, finite, and known do not seem equal, or perhaps even necessarily related. However, because these terms were used by the liberal critics in their attacks on orthodoxy in the 1870's, it is almost unavoidable to use them here in that way. When these various words seem equated therefore, it must be remembered that they are being used in this specific context and not in their more formal sense.

What these liberals ultimately sought, of course, was a revised synthesis which solved these conceptual problems. This was the significance, for instance, of Parker's "Theism" which he contrasts, quite naturally, to the Popular Theology. The major stress of these attempts was upon the unity of the cosmos rather than the opposition of the natural and the supernatural. This meant, of course, a stress upon the immanence of God and upon his infinity. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this changed pattern of thinking. We will discuss this in detail later, but briefly it offered, in the first place, an answer to the epistemological challenge of positivism because even if the transcendental was unknowable, man could at least comprehend God in his immanence. The stress upon unity also allowed a free technical, scientific appraisal of phenomenal events because

there no longer was a dichotomy. Theology, therefore, could remain stable *vis a vis* scientific discovery and allow social analysis and reform at the technical level. Quite simply, nothing was to be considered a purely secular problem, but then neither was there the old tendency to over-emphasize peculiarly spiritual causes and solutions.

German Theological Contributions

There were many of these same critical and constructive elements in German and English theological thought as well and they were utilized by many American thinkers in forming their own thoughts. The German theologian-philosophers, for instance, contributed some of their own thoughts to the liberal critique of conservative orthodoxy. They were, in fact, often as harsh as the positivists in their complaints. There was Fichte, for instance, the brilliant heterodox thinker who asserted that the man who built a utilitarian God to explain what he could not explain--and this was fast becoming the standard liberal charge against the orthodox--was the real atheist.[78] In Fichte's opinion, God was not the finite transcendence perceived by conservative theologians but "One Eternal Infinite Will," more abstract than utilitarian. It was this type of highly abstracted conception of God which best characterized the theological results of German idealism. It was present not only in Fichte, but also in Schelling's union of Intelligence and Identity into the Absolute Indifference and again in Hegel's less static, but equally dialectical view of God. In each case the stress was upon an ethical, highly abstract

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[78]Otto Pfleiderer, *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant and its Progress in Great Britain since 1825* (London: Sonnenschein, 1890), 57.

conception of unity quite far removed from the dualistic anthropomorphism of the theological conservatives. Yet equally significant, this deity was comprehensible and therefore equally divorced from the results of contemporary German rationalism and French positivism. As such, it offered a theistic alternative to both orthodoxy and scientism and thereby a possible basis for a theistic reconciliation. Their stress upon unity brought them close to pantheism (and the orthodox attacked them vigorously for this) but nevertheless this dialectical approach was quite influential in the last third of the century.[79]

Another significant contribution of the Germans came from Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher, who spent most of his career holding positions as professor of theology at the University of Berlin and as pastor of Trinity Church in that same city, employed most of his intellectual capacity trying to discover the proper interaction of the pulpit and the contemporary intellectual life. The basis for his attempt of a reconciliation between the secular and religious thought of his day was his challenge of the basic presuppositions of both the secular rationalists and the orthodox supernaturalists. Both of these groups believed that the Christian faith was a collection of dogmas which, seemingly at least, stood in irreconcilable opposition to modern scientific thought. One group believed that the Christian dogma was correct and defensible against science, the other that it was illogical and ultimately contradictory to science.[80]

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[79] Ibid., 62-80.

[80] Ibid., 103.

What Schleiermacher did was to remove the premise that Christianity was an unchanging collection of doctrines thereby opening the way for some accomodation. Instead, he posited that the Christian faith depended upon feeling and inward experience. God, then, became the "whence" of this basic inward condition which he described as a "feeling of utter dependence" or "God-consciousness."[81] But most significantly, Schleiermacher did not define his "dependence" in such a way as to make it conditional upon a lack of knowledge or human ability. In fact, he believed just the reverse: where man had the least knowledge of nature, he developed a miracle-performing God, which was not an accurate conception of God. On the other hand, he wrote, "where a knowledge of nature is most widely spread, and therefore this conception /of miracles or supernatural influence/ seldom occurs, more is found of that reverence for God which is the expression of our fundamental feeling. It follows from this that the most perfect expression of omnipotence would be a view of the world which made no use of such an idea."[82]

Schleiermacher coupled this distaste for a primitive type of God with an insistence upon the unity of God's activity. Quite plainly, he insisted, "the world of nature is not to be considered as going its own way on the strength of the divine preservation, the divine government only exerting influence on it through special isolated acts, so as to bring it into harmony with the kingdom of grace. To us, rather

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[81] Ibid., 103-104.

[82] Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (trans. from the second German edition, Edinburgh: Clark, 1928), 179.

the two things are absolutely one. . . ."[83]

From the point of view of American theologians the important contribution of these German theologians is their demonstration of an ability to challenge the orthodox conception of God and the world order and yet to stay within the ostensibly Christian tradition. If positivism served as an antithesis to orthodox dogmatism, then liberal German theology served to suggest a possible synthesis. It demonstrated the possibility of a liberal Christianity distinct from both positivism and orthodoxy. On the one hand they seemed to be linked with positivism in the critical analysis and destructive attack upon orthodoxy yet on the other they offered the cornerstones for reconciliation and theistic reconstruction by their faith in an infinite, yet knowable deity.

British Theological Contributions

Many of these same dynamic influences which were coming out of Germany in the 19th century were also evident in British thought. Although they appeared in a less sophisticated form, they were without the handicap of a language barrier which slowed the spread of German theology even within academic circles. In Britain, too, attempts were being made to remove what were now branded as erroneous anthropomorphic ideas from the accepted theology. There, too, attempts were being made to discard the concept of a highly transcendental God, supernatural in form and distinct from the natural environment.

One of the men involved in this criticism of the orthodox doctrines was a British Unitarian named James Martineau (1805-1900).

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[83] Ibid., 723.

Martineau, in accord with what was now the typical liberal attitude, was quite critical of a God constructed to explain what man could not explain as a purely natural phenomenon. It was, therefore, a God based not on the unity of nature but upon its apparent disunity. This simply was not acceptable for Martineau. "His witness is found not only in the gaps," he asserted, "but in the continuity of being,--not in the suspense, but in the everlasting flow of change."[84] How had such errors crept into the heart of the church's thought? Martineau gave his answer to this in terms of the historic past:

> It has been the infatuation of ecclesiastics to miss the inner divine spirit that breathes through the sources of their faith, and to seize as the materials of their system, the perishable conceptions and unverified predictions of more fervent but darker times; so that in the structure they have raised all that is most questionable in the legacy of the past--obsolete Physics, mythical History, Messianic Mythology, Apocalyptical prognostications,--have been built into the very walls, if not made the corner-stone, and now by their inevitable decay threaten the whole structure with ruin. 85

Martineau was not the only British scholar expressing such thoughts. J. C. Shairp, in his inaugural lectures as principle of United College, St. Andrew's, Scotland, defined this god which was based upon man's ignorance--a "god of the gaps" as Martineau had called it--as nothing more or less than a pagan idol. "The preferring of an image of God which we feel to be imperfect, but which has adapted and contracted to our weakness, instead of pressing on to the most perfect image attainable" was one of the great tragedies in the history

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[84]James Martineau, Religion as Affected by Modern Materialism (London: Williams, 1874), 10-11.

[85]Ibid., 8-9.

of theology.[86] Since this was the case, Shairp welcomed scientific advances which he felt would be able to purify theology. They would, he said, "be a help towards forming a better conception of God's nature, and of His ways, and ought to be so used."[87]

Important in a somewhat different way--in fact, unintentionally so--to the attempt to alter the conservative theological view of God, was a controversial Oxford professor of logic, Henry Mansel (1820-1871). Aware of the current controversies, Mansel in his 1859 Bampton lectures attempted to clear the air with a definition of the limits of religious knowledge. His basic theme was that man could not know God either by feeling or by reason. "That the Finite cannot comprehend the Infinite," he said, "is a truth more frequently admitted in theory than applied in practice."[88] But it had to be admitted. "We cannot indeed reason to the existence of an infinite Cause . . . in the form of a finite affection, nor discern it as the law of a finite

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[86]J. C. Shairp, Culture and Religion (N.Y.: Hurd, 1871), 167.

[87]Ibid. Equally critical, perhaps too much so to be of much direct influence, was Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle, well steeped in the German idealism of Schiller and Goethe, was interested in removing false reliances upon an anthropomorphic God. His comment on Goethe is also applicable to himself: "To reconcile reverence with clearness, to deny and defy what is false, and yet to believe and worship what is true." See Pfleiderer, German Theology, 313; see aslo Vernon Storr, The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century (London: Longmans, 1913), 357-358. Also influential in Britain in spreading more liberal ideas were Julius Clark Hare (1795-1855), an Anglican clergyman whose essentially Johannine theology bore fruit in Maurice and Kingsley; and the Scotsmen John MacLeod Campbell and Thomas Erskine for their stress upon Christian experience in a rather Schleiermacherian fashion. (see Storr, English Theology 338-340, 356.)

[88]Henry Mansel, The Limits of Religious Knowledge (Boston: Gould, 1859), 114.

action."[89] What had to be done, he asserted, was to distinguish between the power of conceiving (reason) and the power of believing (faith),[90]

Essentially what Mansel was trying to accomplish by his work was to clear away the false "proofs" of God's existence for a real test based upon Biblical revelation. But, as many of his friends predicted, what most listeners heard in his work was not his claim to a revealed knowledge of the Infinite but his denial of man's ability to know the infinite by reason or feeling. Of course, such things were being said by many secular thinkers, but for an ostensibly orthodox churchman, as Mansel was, to deny that God could be known by reason and feeling was particularly damaging to the conservative defense. Mansel thus became a rather unwilling ally of those men like Spencer who were trying to stress the unknowable quality of the infinite for reasons of their own. In fact, it was Mansel's work which greatly stimulated Spencer's discussion of the Unknowable and Arnold's assertion that we can only know that God is a "power not ourselves."[91]

In terms of the American experience, the most significant British activity was the application of the liberal theological ideas to a social activism. The leader in this work was F. D. Maurice (1805-1872) whose Christian socialism, as he called his particular type of activism, was extremely influential among late 19th century

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[89] Ibid., 117.

[90] Henry Mansel, The Philosophy of the Conditioned (London: Strahan, 1866), 18.

[91] Pfleiderer, German Theology, 330.

American social gospel adherents.

Like many of the liberals, Maurice found it possible to be sympathetic to some of Comte's ideas. For instance, he found much in Comte's three phase theory of history that was attractive. It was, he believed, useful in analyzing the maturation of each individual Christian as well as entire cultures. Maurice, of course, found a great deal in Comte with which he could not agree, especially positivism's Religion of Humanity which in Maurice's opinion was nothing more than a "clear and complete Philosophy of Idolatry." But even here, Maurice found that Comte despite his extremism had illuminated an important truth--the unity of the human race.[92]

Comte's greatest contribution was his boldness in challenging long assumed doctrines and it was in this that Maurice felt most indebted to him. "As a clergyman and a Professor of Moral Theology, I feel myself under unspeakable obligation to [Comte]," he once said, "for he has cleared the ground of much rubbish which has hindered us from knowing where we were standing; he has compelled us to abandon all apologies for our faith, and simply ask ourselves what we suppose it can do for mankind."[93]

This was not an easy question for a churchman to raise. But Maurice's courage in asking it encouraged many others to do the same. And if all of this liberal criticism did nothing else but force orthodoxy to reconsider the social results of its teaching it might well have been considered worth while. Maurice himself found the

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[92]F. D. Maurice, Social Morality (London: Macmillan, 1869), 415-416, 428-429.

[93]Ibid., 416.

the boldness to go further and to discard, rather than hide, what his inquiry showed to be of no benefit to man. The questions had to be asked and the results heeded, he claimed, for "if it can do nothing, if what we have called the Kingdom of Heaven is not concerned about the Reformation or the Regeration of the earth, we must confess that we have been walking in a dream, or have been deliberately imposing a lie upon our fellow creatures."[94] This vigorous expression of concern for humanity became the ethical basis of his Christian socialism and it was also to become the basis of the new theology in America as well, with its increased participation in the search for a solution to man's social ills.

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[94] Ibid.

THE SEARCH FOR A THEISTIC ALTERNATIVE

We have argued in the early parts of this paper that the response of the churchmen to the Panic of 1873 was conditioned and limited by their theological position. If, therefore, the church was to expand the nature of its social concern beyond charity work and evangelism, then there had to be a revision of the theological premises which supported and encouraged the more limited view.

In the last chapter, we tried to show some of the more important dynamic elements which were making a criticism of orthodoxy possible on an intellectual level. We have also tried to show some of the suggested alternatives proposed by these liberals. The common goal which all of them shared was to discard the orthodox conception of a God who exists as a transcendental explanation of phenomenal events. They were trying, in a broad sense, to shift the emphasis from God's sovereignty and providential government of the world to his immanent presence in it. This, of course, hit at the heart of the theological basis for the conservatives' moral interpretation of social catastrophe.

Significantly, this attack was not primarily motivated by some abstract concern for truth. Rather it was based upon an awareness and a fear that an overly transcendent explanation of social events obscured human failings and prevented a real understanding of social problems on a technical level. In fact, it tended to set the church in conflict with science rather than in alliance. Thus it was that they considered the conservative deity an unhealthy crutch.

But the relationship was not simple. The conservative theology

not only prevented a necessary technical appraisal of social phenomena, but in a sense it was a result of man's previous inability to explain them in a natural, technical way. That is, when man could not explain panics in economic terms, the crutch provided by a theocentric explanation was useful as a comfort. But now, with the growth of an embryonic science of economics, there were many, even within the church, who felt they could explain the incidence of economic crises without resorting to supernatural explanations. They understood them, or so they thought, on a purely natural, technical basis. Moral interpretations of panics had become, therefore, in the minds of many, almost as obsolete as a theocentric interpretation of a bolt of lightning. And so, the church, beset by institutional and intellectual inertia, faced the charge of anachronism.

In the light of this situation, much credit must go to positivism as a force in destroying confidence in the orthodox theology. Its historical synthesis not only provided an explanation for the obsolescence of conservative theology, but also a justification for revision. Moreover, its absolute distrust of transcendental explanations on epistemological grounds provided a powerful weapon with which to attack the conservative defenses.

But if positivism did provide an opportunity for liberal churchmen, it also provided them with a challenge. This is true because in its pure form, positivism was not really a very acceptable alternative to orthodoxy. After all, the church which claimed that it did not and could not know the God which it worshipped was scarcely a church at all. In any case, a total acceptance of this positivistic position ultimately meant that religion purely spiritual and devoid of any knowable

relationship to the temporal problems man was forced to solve. Thus, in fact, rather than encouraging social activism by religion, most felt that Comtism would encourage social activism without religion. Thus, although some men like John Fiske and O. B. Frothingham were willing to make an honest attempt at worshipping the Unknown, few were as brave or as bold.

The task, therefore, was a rethinking of the nature of God. The liberal churchmen had to make room for a technical evaluation of social phenomena and yet avoid the nescience of pure positivism. What was needed, most moderates agreed, was a theistic alternative, a God totally infinite, immanent as well as transcendent, yet knowable, if he were to be related to the physical and social situations at all. Those brave enough to venture in search of such a God found considerable aid from the dynamic elements which we have just outlined, especially from the concepts of dialectical unity in German idealism. What this offered was an ability to view the world as both sacred and secular. This was possible by stressing the immanence as well as the transcendence of God, his concern for the totality of the universe, not only his supernaturalism but also his naturalism--in fact, by refusing to admit to distinctions between those apparent opposites and stressing the unity of all. This enabled the development of a reform moralism--a concept with considerable similarity to Bonhoeffer's "holy worldliness"--which while avoiding the secularism of positivism also avoided the old tendency to over-emphasize the transcendental.

"Worshipping the Unknown"

Although, as we just suggested, most American churchmen demanded a considerable modification of positivist doctrine before they were

satisfied that it was useful in their construction of a new theology, a few liberals were flexible and radical enough to accept the concept of an "unknown God" almost intact from Herbert Spencer and to attempt to develop a highly ethical, humanistic religion around the worship of this Unknown. As such, they were important as an expression of positivist influence within the American theological world.

The most important of these Spencerian disciples was a Harvard trained layman named John Fiske. Having begun life as an orthodox New England Calvinist, Fiske traveled, in order, from the faith of his youth through a liberalized Calvinism influenced by the writing of Parker and Emerson, through a stage of infatuation with Humboldt, Buckle, and Comte to his final Spencerian synthesis which he published in 1874 as Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy (basically the same material as he had used in his lectures at Harvard during the academic year of 1869-1870).[1]

Fiske claimed that his system--which he called "Cosmic Theism" and based upon a "skepticism about the adequacy of the creature as the measure of the Creator"--was distinctly Spencerian and not positivist (by which he meant Comte, Mill, and Comte's French disciple Littre).[2] His preference for Spencer was due to the fact that Spencer admitted the existence of an unknown, ultimate reality rather than insisting upon the void which traditional Comtism offered.[3] On this

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[1]H. Burnell Pannill, The Religious Faith of John Fiske (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1957), 43, 54-58, 206; Herbert Schneider, History of American Philosophy (N.Y.: Columbia, 1946), 321.

[2]Pannill, Fiske, 154.

[3]Ibid.

point he was quite explicit. Spencer's system ". . . is a system which, without making appeal to data that are ontological or to agencies that are extra-cosmic, brings all known truths concerning the coexistence and succession of phenomena into relation with one another as the collaries of a single primordial truth, which is alleged of the omnipresent Existence (ignored by Positivism) wherefor the phenomenal world is the multiform manifestation."[4]

Still, Fiske like Spencer had much in common with French positivism, perhaps more than he realized. He accepted, for instance, the sequential theory of causation. "Causation," he claimed, "may therefore be defined as the unconditional invariable sequence of one event, or concurrence of events upon another; and this is all that is given in the phenomenon."[5] This was opposed to the "metaphysical view of cause" which postulated a "hidden power, an occulta vis, in the cause, which operates as an invincible nexus between it and the effect."[6]

Fiske also accepted the positivist theory of history, as is seen in his explanation of the origin of the concept of an occulta vis. Man, he claimed, attempts to translate everything into terms similar to his own experience. Since we move and act by volition and the resultant effort, primitive man, knowing no better, assumed that everything else did as well. Therefore he assumed that wind, for example, either had an occulta vis within it or that it was moved by an outside power. These powers were what primitive religion had

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[4]John Fiske, Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1874), I, x.

[5]Ibid., I, 149ff. The quotation if from 154.

[6]Ibid., I, 54.

set out to discover. But the whole process, Fiske argued, was fruitless. "The attempt to detect the occulta vis or hidden energy in the act of causation, is but the fruitless attempt to bind in the chains of some thinkable formula that universal Protean Power, of whose multitudinous effects we are cognizant in the sequence of phenomena, but which in its secret nature must ever mockingly elude our grasp."[7]

Although theologians were unable to ever capture this unknowable alsolute (since by definition the finite cannot encompass the infinite) they nonetheless tried to describe it in anthropomorphic terms, which after all, were the only terms they had. But in so doing, they had distorted the truth in a massive way, there being nothing more pitiful than a finite infinity.

It was to this Anthropomorphic Theism that Fiske opposited his Cosmic Theism, the result of a continuous evolutionary process of deanthropomorphization (a single stage version of Comte's three stage evolution). This "stripping off of the anthropomorphic attributes of which primeval philosophy clothed the unknown Power which is manifested in phenomena" became Fiske's law of progress for society.[8] Only a belief in an Unknowable God would encourage scientific advance.

In arriving at this conclusion, Fiske recognized the same point which McCosh and Parker had stressed much earlier--that the anthropomorphic conception of the deity was really vulnerable to every advance of human knowledge because it attempted only to identify the occulta vis which the superstitious believed to fill the gaps in

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[7] Ibid., I, 154.

[8] Ibid., I, 176.

human knowledge. Fiske felt, however, that his Cosmic conception of the deity had

> no such precarious tenure, and all that the progress of discovery can do is enlarge and strengthen it. But the anthropomorphic conception, lodged in that ever diminishing area of the Knowable which is today unknown, is driven from outpost to outpost, and robbed of some part of its jurisdiction by every advance of science. Surely that must be an unworthy conception of Deity which is confessedly based upon those limitations alone of finite phenomenal knowledge, which each day's experience proves more and more closely to be but temporary. Surely the teleological hypothesis is built upon a rotten foundation when it has to dread the shock of each advancing wave of knowledge. 9

Not only did an Unknown God stop religious aversion to scientific discovery, but it also promoted a greater moral concern of the Christian with his social environment. Only, and this was the key to Fiske's contribution to a socially active church, only as the concept of God was deanthropomorphized was it possible for man to approach human problems on a technical level. The known God discouraged moral action because man tended to depend upon God rather than upon his own ability to work out his problems. Only when God was unknown was man forced to fend for himself and therefore to stir himself to action. "He who ascribes certain kinds of suffering to antecedent neglect of natural laws," Fiske wrote, "is more likely to shape his conduct so as to avoid a recurrence of the infliction than he who attributes the same kinds of suffering to the wrath of an offended quasi-human Deity, and fondly hopes, by ceremonial propiation of the Deity, to escape in /the/ future."[10]

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[9] Ibid., II, 385-386.

[10] Ibid., II, 304.

Ideas similar to these were also found in the work of O. B. Frothingham (1822-1895), one of the organizers of the Free Religious Association in 1867. Frothingham, a New York Unitarian minister, blatantly called his system the "Religion of Humanity," a title quite suggestive of its positivist origins. Although he adopted the same name and the same basic ideas which Auguste Comte had used for his Religion of Humanity, Frothingham rejected Comte's overly elaborate ritual and priestly trappings which he felt were a corruption of the real positivist message.[11]

The essence of Frothingham's Religion of Humanity, like Fiske's Cosmic Theism, was the worship of an Unknown God. God was simply "Being," unknown and unknowable.[12] Like Fiske, Frothingham argued that such a conception of God, despite all the charges of the orthodox that it would mean the death of all morality, would actually enhance the chances of moral action. He argued that it still provided the comfort that the "upper spheres of the world are filled with Mind" and still made an "uplifted countenance" a possibility. But, while still allowing man to draw strength and encouragement from an absolute being, an unknown God also forced man to be self-sufficient because it removed the "magic genie" aspect of the orthodox God.[13]

"Ours is an age of restatements and reconstructions, of con-

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[11]O. B. Frothingham, Religion of Humanity (N.Y.: Butts, 1873), 33: "It is the Roman Catholic Church over again without its theology; St. Peter's without a saint. It is the mechanism of the old faith without the soul of the new."

[12]Fiske had some ties to the Free Religious Association. He lectured at their meeting in 1874. See Milton Berman, John Fiske: The Evolution of a Popularizer (Cambridge: Harvard, 1961), 110-111; Pannill, Fiske, 50-51.

[13]Frothingham, Religion of Humanity, 46-55.

versions and 'new departures,' in many directions," Frothingham proclaimed, and he, for one, was bold enough and brave enough, like Fiske, to abandon almost the entirety of the old faith and to venture into the mysteries of worshipping the Unknown.[14]

"Making the Unknown Knowable . . ."

If, however, worship of the unknown was satisfying to radicals like Frothingham and the young Fiske, it was insufficient for the vast majority of the churchmen. Henry Ward Beecher once commented that he "would rather chew thistledown all summer than to work with any such idea as that."[15] Fiske's work was, to be sure, read with great interest and much profit by many of the progressive churchmen, but almost to a man, these men had to make severe modifications in Fiske's epistemology before they could adopt much from his thought. Even Fiske himself, found it necessary to make some concessions and to admit the propriety of some anthropomorphic symbols if man were to speak of God at all.[16] The task of transporting the benefits of the Fiske-Spencer-Frothingham type of theology into the mainstream of American religious thought became one of "making the unknown knowable."

One method of permitting knowledge of the absolute was proposed by John Bascom (1827-1911), longtime professor at Williams College and later president of the University of Wisconsin. Bascom, a student of Laurens Hickok, had absorbed much of his teacher's Kantian episte-

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[14] Ibid., 30.

[15] Henry Ward Beecher, "Theological Statement," in Lyman Abbott, Henry Ward Beecher (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1903), 430.

[16] Pannill, Fiske, 161.

mology and now found that Kant was a valuable ally in the argument against those positivists who had built upon only one half of Kant's thought. Bascom's objective was to retain the benefits of the positivist method of appraising the phenomenal sphere in a functional manner and at the same time to restore a faith in man's ability to comprehend the noumenal world.

Bascom's theory of knowledge was based upon the proposition that there was not one but two "distinct fields of inquiry," those of matter and those of mind, each controlled by innate "primitive" or "regulative" ideas.[17]

> Matter gives us fixed, conditioned, permanent forces, whose law of interaction is causation, and whose abode is space. Mind gives us variable, spontaneous powers; spontaneous in that there is not present permanent or transmuted force, but power in its very exercise, springing into being; variable in that it is not conditioned to one degree or grade of expression, but only restricted to a certain circle of results. 18

There was no reason, therefore, that we could not know ultimates. The fact was that we knew phenomena by one aspect of our faculties did not preclude our knowing spiritual things by another aspect. Bascom became a bit impatient with those like Spencer and Mansel who ruled this second realm off limits simply because it could not be known in the same way. "The truth is," he concluded, "our knowledge strikes into two very different realms--the phenomenal and the unphenomenal, our wisdom is to deny or to waste neither branch. . . ."[19]

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[17]John Bascom, Science, Philosophy, and Religion (N.Y.: Putnam, 1871), 53-54, 238.

[18]Ibid., 238.

[19]Ibid., 278.

But, and this is significant, unlike many of his conservative fellows who also admitted two spheres, Bascom saw the knowledge of the unphenomenal not coming directly or independently of experience, but rather growing out of our knowledge of the phenomenal. "We grow into the invisible through the visible, the incomplete through the complete, the commanding spiritual intuition through a studious inquiry into the actual conditions, the physical or mental facts, which evoke it."[20] The merit of allowing experience to grow into "intuition" was that like positivism it allowed man to look at his environment in scientific terms, but yet it also went beyond to allow a suitable spiritual dimension. This was the substance of his more progressive approach.

When Andrew Peabody gave the 1874 Ely Lectures at Union Theological Seminary, it was to this same problem which he addressed himself. He, too, tried to show that Christianity and science were each able to obtain a knowledge of their own spheres of interest. But, unlike Bascom who saw them dualistically as results of two separate, yet equally valid aspects of man's capacities, Peabody went so far as to argue that both science and Christianity used the same method. Each of them built upon the same three sources of proof: (1) testimony--for the Christian, the Bible and the church fathers, for scientists, the work of fellow scientists; (2) experiment or experience--for the Christian, the impact of faith upon the social order, for scientists, observation and laboratory testing; and (3) intuition--that jump from "is" to therefore must be which was the final step for each.[21] What

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Andrew Peabody, Christianity and Science (N.Y.: Ketcham, 1871), 11, 12, 165ff., 211ff.

Peabody was attempting to show was that Christianity was as "scientific" and knowledgeable as science, or that science was as "intuitive" or "unscientific" as religion. Each was equally legitimate. Peabody's work was primarily apologetic, but also contributive to a resolution of the epistemological problems between positive science and religion.[21]

The most philosophically sophisticated attempt to retain a knowable God in the face of the Spencerian attack came from a young Boston scholar, Borden P. Bowne (1847-1910). Extremely well educated, Bowne graduated from New York University in 1871 and after two years as a teacher and a Methodist clergyman, went to Europe for study at the universities at Halle and Gottingen between 1873 and 1875. After his return to the United States, he spent the rest of his academic career teaching philosophy at Boston University.

Feeling as strongly as he did about the dangerous implications of the Spencerian system, it was against Spencer himself that the young Bowne, then only twenty-six, turned his attack. The first attack upon Spencer was published in a series of articles in the New Englander.[22] These were followed by an equally sharp, critical volume The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer in 1874. Spencer, Bowne charged, was a Trojan horse. His nescience was better than Comte's atheism and therefore might be able to slip through the defenses of the religious community, as indeed it had in Fiske's work. But Bowne was certain that denying the ability of man to know reality was as bad as denying

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[22]New Englander, XXXI (Jan., 1872), 86-110, "Herbert Spencer's Law of the Unknowable;" XXXII (Jan., 1873), 1-34, "Herbert Spencer's Law of the Knowable;" XXXII (Apr., 1873), 217-242, "Moral Intuition vs. Utilitarianism;" XXXII (July, 1873), 468-506, "Herbert Spencer's Principle of Psychology."

reality itself.[23] If all one could know was the relationship between things, how, Bowne wondered, was one to discern relationships between unknown things? Obviously to Bowne, one could not and therefore Spencer's system effectively denied all knowledge.

Bowne was not, however, totally critical of Spencer. He did feel that there was much which could be gained from his work. Essentially, he felt that Spencer had undertaken a legitimate task, but that his faulty method had led to a dangerous conclusion. Spencer had indeed "mowed down the 'pseudo-ideas' without mercy;" which was at the very least a major contribution. Unfortunately, however, in his enthusiasm, Spencer had "mowed off his own legs" as well.[24] A true religion, Bowne believed, had two elements, mystery and manifestation implicit in its God. Spencer's merit was that he had destroyed false theories of manifestation; his fault was that he left nothing but mystery, and at least in Bowne's opinion, "religion cannot live on nescience, and reverence is impossible toward a blank."[25]

The problem, therefore, was to retain some knowable dimension to the deity. While in Euope, Bowne studied under Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881), the proponent of an ethical idealism which in Bowne's terminology became known as personalism. Lotze had built a rather sophisticated philosophical evaluation of the universe for which his main building unit was what he termed the "self." He defined the self as "an ultimate, empirical reality, whose unity is given as

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[23] New Englander, XXXI (Jan., 1872), 98.

[24] Borden P. Bowne, The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer (N.Y.: Hunt, 1881), 32. (First edition published, 1874).

[25] Ibid., 77-78.

basic to both experience and nature."[26] Personality, then, or the basic quality of the self, was the very "status, condition, or character of existence" and all reality was in some sense personal, i.e., possessing self-consciousness and self-direction.[27]

For Bowne, God became the Person of Persons, using the terms in the context of Lotze's thought. Man could therefore gain knowledge of God intuitively by virtue of sharing a common personality. It was a concept of the personality of God as distinct from the earlier view of personality in God.[28] What Bowne did was to adopt Lotze's highly abstract definition of personality and use it to enable him to identify a highly abstract, non-anthropomorphic conception of God as nonetheless personal. Since God was personal, then, despite his infinity, there was a common ground upon which man could know God.

So, for Bowne, knowledge was built upon the personality of both God and man; for Bascom upon the dual faculties of man. Their attempt was to regain a measure of knowability in their theology. But, and this is very important, it was in both cases an attempt to prove the knowability of the type of infinite, immanent God which Herbert Spencer had grasped. It was never an attempt to return to the finite, anthropomorphic God of the orthodox theologians. Bowne's God was personal, but never anthropomorphic. God was to be known in his ultimate infinity, not as a finite God built upon human weakness and ignorance. For both Bascom and Bowne, a knowledge of God was

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[26]Schneider, American Philosophy, 467.

[27]Ralph Winn, American Philosophy (N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1955), 157-158, 284; Elliot-Binns, English Thought, 235-236.

[28]Clement C. J. Webb, Personality and God (Aberdeen: Univ. Press, 1919), 65.

built upon the unity rather than upon any apparent evidence of disunity or upon the gaps in man's knowledge of the natural world.[29]

". . . Yet Still Infinite"

If there was anything upon which these liberals agreed, it was that they could not go back to the orthodox conception of God in their attempt to resolve the epistemological problems inherent in an acceptance of positivistic ideas. The liberal antipathy to the orthodox conception of God had always been strong, but now it was compounded by the fact that it was seen as prohibitive of a great deal of social action. Moreover, it tended to promote the type of autonomous secularism preached by the positivists. So long as the orthodox conception of God was premised upon the naturally inexplicable, and it was not the common charge that it was, then the church ran the risk of having its theology dissolve if the mysteries ever became technically explicable. McCosh had warned about the dangers implicit in the conservative doctrine a good many years earlier. Borden Bowne saw them too when he wrote:

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[29] Ibid., 238-239; also John Bascom, Things Learned by Living (N.Y.: Putnam, 1913), 203-215 for criticism of a God based upon the gaps in man's knowledge. For a similar 20th century opinion, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1953), 164. Also see Gabriel Vahanian, No Other God (N.Y.: Braziller, 1966). Vahanian defines "secularity" as the "attitude by which the Christian affirms the original goodness of the world." (18) It is therefore a combination of a desacralized world view and the retention of some vertical, moral dimension. He opposites this term to the "eschatalogical existence" of the supernaturalists and also the approach of "secularism" by which he means a desacralized world without the retention of some vertical or numinous morality. This latter concept results from the surrender of Christianity to the level of the world. (18-23, 30-32, 13-14).

> I must confess that I feel rather suspicious of an argument for the Divine existence which is based upon nature's disorder and breaks, rather than upon its order and continuity. For if the disorder whould ever be reduced, and the breaks mended, which is not at all unlikely, what then would become of the conclusion? 30

It was too obvious. The result of scientific inquiry then "must be to elevate matter to the throne of God." This was the reason that orthodox clergymen felt the hot breath of science upon their necks and felt that "God has been driven farther and farther away." "Hence," Bowne reasoned, "the pertinacity with which theists have sought for breaks in the physical chain; and hence it is that as chasm after chasm has filled up, they have felt as if the ground were slipping from under their feet."[31]

So they could not go back. They had to find a theistic alternative to both orthodoxy and positivism which would be based upon the unity of nature and the immanence as well as the transcendence of God--in fact, upon his ultimate infinity and true omnipresence. The goal was to keep a knowable, personal God which also enabled the church to be socially active and theology to remain stable in the face of scientific advance.

In order to avoid the complication of pantheism in their stress upon the unity of the natural and the supernatural, the most sophis-

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[30]Bowne, Spencer, 238-239.

[31]Ibid. See also Joseph LeConte, Religion and Science (N.Y.: Appleton, 1873), 103, "Increasing knowledge, therefore dissipates the one, while it only increases the incomprehensibleness of the other." LeConte, a geologist, was a friend of Hegelian G. W. Hawison and had read Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Comte, Hamilton, and Spencer although he disliked their philosophical technicality. He wrote Religion and Science at the urging of Beecher. See LeConte, Autobiography (N.Y.: Appleton, 1903), 286, 289.

ticated philosophical theologians adopted the dialectical form of thought from the Germans. Rather than a mere merger or sum of opposites their result was the dialectical end of their opposition. The terminology of this dialectic varied with almost every exposition but the concept expressed was constant.

Ranson Welch, a liberal Presbyterian from Union College, wrote of the "Final Centre, around which the universe of matter and the universe of mind revolve."[32] He thought of it as the dialectic of Faith and Material, including both and yet beyond. "The centre," Welch believed, "self-supporting, all-supporting centre, is beyond the finite and philosophic. There is not a pantheistic whole, and the centre can not be pantheistic."[33]

F. E. Abbot, although he did not put his ideas into book form until 1885, was beginning to construct a dialectical theology as early as the 1860's. He usually spoke of this as "Scientific Theism" and as the result of the dialectical reaction between the Immanent and the Transcendent. At other times, with virtually the same meaning, he talked of the synthesis of "Being and Knowing in the 'I'". And, still elsewhere, God became the "Infinite Self-Conscious Intellect."[34]

By far the most complex and sophisticated attempt at a dialectical, philosophical theology was made by Charles W. Shields (1825-1904), a Princeton educated Presbyterian clergyman. Shields became interested

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[32]Ranson B. Welch, Faith and Modern Thought (N.Y.: Putnam, 1876) 109.

[33]Ibid.

[34]F. E. Abbot, Scientific Theism (Boston: Little, Brown, 1885), 155, 213, 210-22, 208, 157; The ideas in this book were developed much earlier than its publication date would indicate. It is, according to the author, substantially built upon two articles in the North American Review in 1864.

in the search for what he called a "Final Philosophy" (or at times the "Philosophia Ultima") as a reconciliation of the conflict between science and religion while minister of the Second Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. In 1861, he outlined the basic nature of what was to become for him a lifelong task. His little book Philosophia Ultima attracted the attention of several wealthy Philadelphians who endowed a chair for him in Princeton College. In 1865, therefore, he resigned from his pastoral duties and moved to Princeton. During his years there, he proved himself both a widely-read scholar and a productive writer, publishing the fruits of his study in the Final Philosophy, or System of Perfectable Knowledge Issuing from the Harmony of Science and Religion in 1877 and the Philosophia Ultima (two volumes) in 1888-1889.[35]

It was soon evident from his writing that Shields had little patience for those who felt that the realms of science and religion were irreconcilable and that one or the other must triumph in the end. Both sought the truth and the truth was ultimately singular. Any attempt to separate the two would commit the folly of shutting religion off from the world, making it a spiritual nonentity, or remove morality from science defining it as infidelity. If there were only religion, Shields explained, everything would be viewed as "miraculous" and if there were only science, everything would be viewed as only "natural." In the view of his philosophy, however, both "will appear

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[35]Charles W. Shields, Philosophia Ultima (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1861); The Final Philosophy (N.Y.: Armstrong, 1877); Philosophia Ultima (N.Y.: Scribner, 1888-1889); See also William Sloane, Charles Woodruff Shields: A Biographical Sketch (N.Y.: Scribner, 1905) for information on the life of Shields.

only more and more consistent aspects of one and the same reality."[36]

Shields saw three basic philosophic alternatives to the current tension between orthodoxy and the secular world. First was the victory of positivism, which meant the total destruction of the metaphysical world of revelation. The second was the alternative of German absolutism or idealism which admitted only the metaphysical and too often superseded true revelation with man's speculation.[37] The third alternative, and that proposed by Shields, was that of the Ultimate Philosophy. He explained himself in this way:

> A little reflection will show that but one course is now open to the speculative mind. It would be folly to reject either of its present tendencies /positivism and idealism/, merely because of their extreme development, and it would be impossible to hold to both in their existing antagonism.
>
> In other words, the problem which is now to be met is that of a logical conciliation of the Absolute Philosophy and the Positive Philosophy, in some final philosophy which shall be their sequel and their complement. 38

It was a brave task, to synthesize Hegel and Comte, to merge their thoughts into one system. To some it was sheer nonsense, especially to the conservative theologians at neighboring Princeton Seminary. To them Hegel and Comte were guilty of theological error; synthesizing them would only compound the heresy. But what, Shields wanted to know, was the alternative to a theistic reconciliation of idealism and positivism? Would it be the pantheism of the Hegelians, the secularism of the Comtists, or the anthropomorphism of the conservative orthodox? Surely not. Shields was certain that such conceptions

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[36]Shields, Final Philosophy, 473.

[37]Ibid., 534, 476.

[38]Ibid., 537.

of the absolute could not satisfy the needs of the age. Only a more perfect, a Final Philosophy, would have the comprehensiveness necessary to prevent religion from being dashed against the rocks by the advancing tide of human knowledge. To those orthodox theologians who scoffed at the futility of such a task, Shields was fond of quoting a favorite passage from Schleiermacher:

> I shall not live to see those days, but may lay myself down to my last sleep in peace. But what do you and your contemporaries intend to do? Will you entrench yourselves behind the outworks and let yourselves be blockaded by science? The bombardment of derision would do you little harm. But the blockade? The starving out by science, which, because you thus entrench yourselves, will be forced by you to raise the standard of unbelief? Is it thus that the knot of history is to be severed, and Christianity to be allied with ignorance, and science with unbelief? 39

The Nature of the Church and the Christian Life

Where did all this lead in terms of the church and the individual Christian vis a vis his society? Quite significantly, it led to a synthetic conclusion also. The removal of the overt stress upon the sovereignty of God and his providential government of the universe allowed an appraisal of the world in technical terms not unlike those of the positivist. Economic panics could become first and foremost economic and not religious crises. But on the other hand, the new clerical interpretation was different from the purely secular positivist because it still did retain a moral dimension in the religious zeal and religious criteria which it carried into its technical analysis. It meant a merger of the technical and the religious, an assignment of a religious significance to the worldly work around men.

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[39] Ibid., 399-400.

It meant that the church sought not so much for the transcendental "why" but for the immanent religious significance in the "how." It meant that the church found the essence of its God and its religion in the daily functioning of life around it. It meant an acceptance of what we have called a "reform moralism" as opposed to the pietistic moralism of the orthodox. These were the results of the increasing stress upon the unity and immanence of God. As the socially active Episcopalian clergyman F. D. Huntington pointed out, when examining the needs and concerns of human society, the key question was "not to find out whether God is, but where he is."[40]

The first, and perhaps the most important, half of this dialectical stress upon the unity of the cosmos and the immanence of God was the ability of the church to discard the orthodox moral, pietistic interpretation of physical and social phenomena and to see the world in natural terms as world *per se*. Minot Savage, a liberal Unitarian minister with a considerable admiration for Herbert Spencer, pointed to the essence of the changed pattern of thought. In the old days, he said, the Church believed that "earthquakes and tempests and floods and volcanic eruptions and pestilences and diseases and death were all either the spiteful work of the devil, or else the vengeful judgments of God for human sin."[41] And since these catactrophic visitations were seen as agents of divine purpose with transcendental connotations, then the churchmen tended to think in terms of spiritual solutions also. But for the young theologians who had read Spencer, it was very

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[40] F. D. Huntington, *Human Society* (N.Y.: Carter, 1860), 3.

[41] Minot Savage, *The Religion of Evolution* (Boston: Lockwood, 1877), 102.

evident that a theocentric interpretation of this kind was, as Comte had shown, merely the relic of an earlier, less sophisticated age. Was it not "a little curious," Savage taunted the orthodox, "that God has ceased sending his lightning as punishment for sin just as fast and as far as Franklin's invention of lightning rods has been properly applied?"[42] The disappearence of natural catastrophes, Savage concluded, was contingent not upon righteousness, but upon sufficient knowledge and application of technical, scientific discovery. The key lay not in an understanding of any transcendental "why" but in an understanding of a functional "how." "The devil of the physical world, then, is only ignorant maladjustment."[43]

If Savage attacked the imposition of theocentric interpretations upon physical phenomena, this same type of logic was extended from the physical to the social and economic areas by a theologically sophisticated layman and economist, Henry C. Carey. And it was here, in the area of social interpretation, that the major battles of the late 19th century were to be fought because even if most of the orthodox had accepted the dictates of science in the physical world, they were still unwilling to admit a science of society.

Although Carey abhorred their penchant for nescience, he still appreciated and drew quite heavily from the methodology and historical analysis of the positivist. And, typically, he felt that their greatest contribution was their emphasis upon the unity of the cosmos. Moreover, he was convinced that this essential unity of laws through the universe included the social as well as the world of the physical or

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[42] Ibid., 103-104.

[43] Ibid., 106.

natural sciences.[44] "There is but one system of laws for the government of all matter," he wrote, "whether existing in the form of a piece of coal, a tree, a horse, or a man--and but one mode of study for all departments of it."[45]

It was just as preposterous, therefore, to interpret a social catastrophe in theocentric terms as it was a physical. Financial ills were as naturally explained as lightning. Each was equally avoidable if man had sufficient knowledge and used sufficient care. As it was now, Carey complained, man was approaching social problems with the sophistication of a savage who sees the forces of nature as "the efforts of beings like himself--great and powerful no doubt, but with good and evil propensities and subject to every human caprice."[46] What was badly needed was a "social science" to treat the relations of man not only with his physical world but also with the social one.[47] Until this was done, Carey warned, "we make no progress, and from the very nature of our method of investigation, we can make none."[48]

But if the new clerical appraisal had stopped here, it would soon have been as purely secular as the positivist. The churchmen would have become sociologists, seeing the technical relationships between areas of society and uttering their assurances that a know-

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[44]Henry C. Carey, The Unity of Law (Phila.: Baird, 1872), 38-39.

[45]Ibid., 74.

[46]Ibid., 32. Carey has lifted this quotation and much of this argument from the July, 1871, Westminster Review, a journal sympathetic to positivist viewpoints.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

ledge of these would lead to a solution. But they did keep a religious dimension to their work and this prevented their following the positivists all the way to secular humanism. Because of their stress upon unity and immanence, it was also possible for them to see divinity as well as naturalness in the world and it was still religiously significant how man acted in handling worldly problems. There was still a very real vertical dimension and a religious standard of justice and equality and love which the Christian was to exude in his daily life. In one sense, therefore, the realm of God was expanded, in a different fashion to be sure, but nonetheless expanded. Never again was anything totally devoid of religious significance. It was, as Theodore Parker had written, "the whole world will be a temple, every spot holy ground, every bush burning with the Infinite, all time the Lord's day, and every moral act worship and sacrament."[49]

But, and this is significant, because the conception of God was different and immanent, it was a religious significance of a different kind. What had happened was that the liberals who devised the theistic reconstruction of the late 19th century came to see that man's relationship to the world and his fellow man was the key to his relationship to God, which was rather the opposite from the standard orthodox view. The approach to the Infinite was, for all of these men, by way of the finite.[50] They all put the emphasis on Christian experience and on the Christian life as the key to increasing knowledge of God.

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[49]Parker, Sermons, 227.

[50]See John Bascom, Bibliotheca Sacra, XXIV, 743, for an instance of the demise of the old first cause concept; also Andrew Peabody, Christianity and Science, 211-212, who sees intuition as the last step rather than the first to the knowledge of God.

Henry Carey was adamant on this point. It was the nature of man's social relationships which constituted the moral individual, the "real MAN" as Carey called him.[51] It was the phenomenal existence which led to the spiritual, a view which was only possible so long as God was seen as immanent in the world. Carey argued that the "real MAN" holds "his existence in virtue of laws of universal force and effect; and that the teacher who fails to familiarize himself with them, and with their bearing on societary and Christian life, fails in the performance of his duty to his Creator and to his fellow man."[52]

Here the break with orthodoxy was complete. Christianity was not a spiritual relationship which men gained to a utilitarian God in order to enable the physical life to follow effortlessly. Rather the proper relationship with God was achieved by a proper man-man relationship, This change was in a large measure traceable to the influence of positivist nescience because, to many, the only portion of God's infinity which man was able to know and therefore to serve was that part revealed in the phenomenal world. Minot Savage was explicit in describing the difference between the old and the new. Conservative orthodoxy said that

> 'You must obey the priest, you must go to church, you must pay tithes, you must partake of the sacraments, you must do this thing, you must do that thing. Now we believe, and, in the light of science, it perfectly clear to us, that none of these things have any essential relation whatever to religion; and a man may be religious, and disregard every one of them, and a man may do every one of them, and a thousand more, and be utterly and through and through irreligious.
>
> Science, then, is definitely settling for us

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[51] Carey, Unity, 76.

[52] Ibid., 127.

> what is right and what is wrong, by observing the facts in regard to human nature. 53

It was this same scorn for the pietistic orientation of the orthodox and this same stress upon an active quality of life which prompted Henry Ward Beecher to cut down an extravagant praise of Vanderbilt's love of Pilgrim's Progress and gospel hymns with the remark that "I am glad he liked the hymns, but had he sung them thirty years ago it would have made a great difference. He did not sing hymns as long as he could get about. We don't want to give God the fag end of our lives."[54] The point was that the true spiritual life was not always the companion of religious formulae and could only be found by living.

The focus of the Christian life, they all agreed, was the obligation of the Christian to his fellow man. For some, such as Jesse Jones, radical Congregational clergyman from North Abington, Massachusetts, the question was not so much the human leading to the divine as it was the very inseparableness of them. "A man stands in two relations," he wrote, "one to God and one to his fellow man. If Christianity is to work a thorough salvation for mankind, it must transform human character and human action in both these relations."[55] Jones diagramed the triple reciprocity--man, society, and God-- with each depicted as part of the whole and linked in a triangular fashion

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[53]Savage, Religion of Evolution, 28-29.

[54]Sugmund Diamond, The Reputation of the American Businessman (N.Y.: Harper, 1966), 59-60.

[55]Jesse Jones, The Kingdom of Heaven (Boston, 1871), 64; Jones was a founder of the Christian Labor Union in 1872, a group influenced by utopian socialism. See James Dombrowski, The Early Days of Christian Socialism (N.Y.: Columbia Univ., 1936), 79-81.

around and by the person of Christ. This he proposed as the "science of Christianity."[56]

The new appraisal of the duties of man in society opened up a vast world of social action to the church. It became, in fact, in the social mission of the church that it found its reason for existence. If some men, like Samuel Harris and Henry Ward Beecher, still talked of sin as the cause of social disorder, it was now in the context and with the connotation that sin was found in the improper and unjust condition of the social order. It was not a question of man's not being reconciled to God's order, but of not having properly reconciled his social order with God's law. For Henry C. Carey, morality was equated with self-respect which "grows as men are more and more enabled to meet on terms of strict equality. It declines as the gulf is widened that divides those who have labor to buy from those who need to sell it."[57]

When theologians began thus to talk of morality in terms of labor-capital relations and to deny the divinity of the basic structure of the social order, then the way was open to a serious consideration of the church as a reforming power and to a serious appraisal of the shortcomings of the social system. Men like Yale's Samuel Harris, for instance, could demand a Kingdom of Christ on earth, and declare that

> it has become plain to the thoughtful that this principle of individual liberty is inadequate. Under it the old principle of the dominion of the strongest still creeps in; the tyranny wrested from the government reappears in the

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[56]Jones, Kingdom, xiii.

[57]Carey, Unity, 327.

> social sphere; the purse is as forceful as the sword. When competition does not pay, the competitors combine to force prices above their natural level; the rich grow richer, and the poor poorer. Inequalities not only increase, but stiffen into castes; it becomes more and more difficult for the inferiors to rise by honest industry to independence. The whole tone of society becomes more and more vulgar and coarse-grained; bent on sordid ends and seeking them by sordid means. 58

For Jesse Jones, Christ's work was "equally POLITICAL and religious."[59] Jones, who viewed the New Jerusalem as "pure and universal communism,"[60] and who like many other radicals soon gravitated to Christian socialism, best pointed out the difference between the orthodox and liberal moral interpretations. The orthodox saw a "'spiritual kingdom;' a religious reign of Jesus in the hearts of human beings, by which they are led to become pious, perform various devotional duties, and become kind-hearted, benevolent, virtuous, and honest, in the various relations of life as already fixed in human society."[61]

This was the key, of course, to the orthodox providential theology, a theology which Jones saw as inconsistent with the real truths of Christianity. The object of the Church was not complete if it only evoked kind-heartedness. Rather the whole purpose of Jones' ministry and of those who like him abandoned the orthodox theology for the social theology of liberalism was to enforce a single idea--

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[58]Samuel Harris, The Kingdom of Christ on Earth (Andover: Warren Draper, 1874), 164-165.

[59]Jones, Kingdom, xviii.

[60]Ibid., 342-343.

[61]Ibid., 69.

"that Christianity involves an absolute and total revolution in the structure of society."[62] This willingness to address oneself to a program of reform on a societal as well as an individual basis was a substantial difference and one which was amply evident in the reaction to the Panic of 1873 by the few bold, progressive thinkers who foreshadowed the social gospel which finally triumphed in the last years of the century.

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[62] Ibid., 36.

LIBERAL VIEWS OF THE PANIC OF 1873

There were some American clergymen who had already accepted at least an embryonic form of this reform moralism by 1873. Like their more conservative brethren, they, too, spoke out freely in response to the great panic of that year. Mostly younger men settled in the great industrial cities of the Northeast, these clergymen and their allies present a definite contrast to the conservative churchmen. The difference was sometimes one of substance, but more often merely one of emphasis and tone. In any case, it was significant.

The divergence first became visible in their appraisal of the causes of the panic. As one would expect, these clergymen who had already adopted a technical view of economic phenomena were less likely to dwell on spiritual immorality as a cause of the panic. In fact, if they cried out against business and political dishonesty at all, it was in the context of a criticism of orthodox religion which they claimed was the cause, not the cure, for the demoralized state of the nation. The Liberal Christian was quite blunt in making this charge:

> /The/ indefiniteness, unscrupulousness and make-believe character of a considerable part of so-called orthodoxy is at the root of social laxities and business defalcations. [1]

If they gave the panic a religious interpretation at all, it was that it pointed out the anachronistic nature of the orthodox theology. If there was a "religious cause" at all it was the encouragement that the church had given to injustice. "The warnings of the pulpit should be based upon experience, the laws of nature, and the

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[1] Liberal Christian, Oct. 4.

Sermon on the Mount. . . ," complained the Universalist Quarterly. "Its object is to make the world wiser, better and happier." Instead, the orthodox clergy presented nothing but an "endless round of faith and anxiety."[2]

It was no wonder that this conservative type of preaching led to infidelity and accusations that the church was insensitive to the needs of the day. What could you expect, asked Henry Ward Beecher, "if you interpret the New Testament so that it shall lead to the treading down of the poor; so that it shall sanction tyranny; so that it shall recognize no religion except that which the priest gives. . . ?"[3] Thus rather than seeing the panic as the result of a failure to follow the pietistic creed, these liberals saw it as evidence that the conservative social views were unsuitable. If the panic could help science in its attack on this type of religion then all the better. If the conservative religion collapsed, few liberals would shed many tears. "I would as soon cry because the leaves drop off the white oak in spring," Beecher said, "as to cry for that."[4]

Quite in contrast to the conservative theocentric interpretation of the causes of the panic, liberals felt that the panic had natural economic causes which were in themselves a sufficient explanation. They spoke less of sin and the sovereignty of God than they did of "folly," "mismanagement," and human responsibility. When they spoke of speculation as a contributing cause, for example, it was in the

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[2]Universalist Quarterly, XI (July, 1874), 304, 299; see also Index, Sept. 25.

[3]Sermon of Nov. 27, Plymouth Pulpit, Dec. 13.

[4]Ibid.

context of faulty economic policy rather than immorality.[5] Henry Ward Beecher's Christian Union was able to find suitable explanations of the catastrophe in the financial situation itself without direct reference to an ultimate causal force. The weekly summarized the problem quite succinctly:

> A has been building railroads faster than the development of the country demanded them. B has been borrowing money from the rest of the alphabet for him to do it with, giving A's notes as security. But the tradesmen have sent in their bills and when X, Y, Z, and the rest go to B for money, he is obliged to tell them it is all lent to A. Therefore no one can pay his bills, and the delicate running gear of the financial engine comes to a dead-lock. [6]

There was, therefore, a tendency to look for phenomenal causes for the panic. And, quite naturally, when one thinks in these terms about causes, one is prone to think in phenomenal terms about possible solutions as well. That is, when one expresses his estimate of the causes of the panic in the manner which the Christian Union did in the above quotation, then he is led to search for ways to unlock the "financial engine" and insure its continued operation rather than ways to promote charity and evangelism. The preventive for panics was, therefore, not repentance but rather "learning" and "experience" and a determination not to fall into the same errors again.

This difference was well recognized by the liberals and they were quite disdainful of the conservative attempts to ease the panic. The Nation, a journal of general opinion essentially in accord with the

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[5] Universalist Quarterly, XI (Apr., 1874), 150-151; Old and New, IX (Jan., 1874), 41, 55; Monthly Religious Magazine, L (Nov., 1973), 471.

[6] Christian Union, Sept. 24.

liberal reform moralism, remarked that "the panic is not going to regenerate us, but then we do not need regeneration nearly so much as some people are trying to make out."[7] It was all very well and good, the Nation said in another issue, to urge morality and thrift and diligence, "but it is better still to understand what brings inundations and plagues about, or to share fully and freely in the work of preventing them, instead of sitting with folded hands and praying lips waiting for them."[8]

This dislike for what they considered to be the overly passive implications of the conservative providential theology and their belief that a technical understanding of the functional relationships in the economy could lead to relief, led the liberals to admit the government to a much larger role in the financial world. Whereas the conservatives had seen the government's role in a rather negative manner to enforce their concept of piety and honesty, the liberals were more willing to use the government to achieve positive changes in the social order and the status of people. There was, for example, a greater stress upon governmental activity to relieve poverty rather than the former emphasis upon the benevolent associations.[9]

More importantly, they were also willing to use the government's taxing powers to promote a more even distribution of wealth, curbing what they considered excessive collections of wealth. In fact, for these liberals, wealth carried not the connotation of piety which it had for many conservatives, but the suspicion of foul play. There was

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[7]Nation, Oct. 16.

[8]Ibid., Oct. 30.

[9]See for instance, Catholic World, XVII, 1.

no reason, the liberals urged, that the government should not "put bit and bridle into the mouth" of large corporations.[10] Some were even willing to go so far as recommending public ownership of corporations, a suggestion which ran directly counter to the old orthodox assumption of free enterprise as a key pillar of God's providential order.[11]

A similar approach to social problems was also evident in their observations upon the contemporary political world. For most of these men, the answer to political abuse, corruption, and government by vested interest, lay not, as it did for the conservatives, in a revival of pietistic impulses among political officials, but in an aroused populace and a reform of the governmental machinery to allow their voice to be heard. As did their heirs of the Progressive tradition, they felt that all would be well if the system were such that true control lay in the hands of "the people." "The true citizenship," declared the Reverend E. Y. Hicks of Portland, Maine, was the "hope of the nation."[12]

As once might expect, the established church and many in the business community were not at all friendly toward this new breed of clergyman. When any of them set out specific plans for reforming the current order, they were quickly called to task by both the conservative denominational weeklies and the daily commercial press.

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[10] Advance, Feb. 5, 1874.

[11] See for example, Universalist Quarterly, XI (Apr., 1874), 150-151.

[12] Sermon of E. Y. Hicks, Thanksgiving Day, 1873, in Christian Mirror, Dec. 2. See also Truth Seeker, Mar., 1874; Christian Union, Oct.8.

Henry Ward Beecher, for instance, spoke on the panic in Boston on October 2, 1873, and expressed his belief that there should be governmentally imposed limitations on wealth and property. This, he argued, would go a long way toward eliminating the inequalities at the root of the financial distress. His speech, of course, drew heavy criticism from the conservative Boston dailies. Beecher, they claimed, was simply being "startling at the cost of being just." Following the typical conservative line, they argued that there was really little that could be done. Panics would come and go in their providential pattern until the end of the earth. Certainly, "nothing can be done by attempts to restrict the substantial freedom of man's energies in the accumulation of property and the conduct of business as practiced everywhere in enlightened society." It was simple folly to legislate economic status. Beecher was trying to tamper with the permanent and unchanging. The implication was that Beecher had gotten the cart before the horse; status could not come before piety. The church's work, therefore, as the conservatives understood it, was to instill virtue in individuals and not to reconstruct social categories. Quite bluntly, they suggested that Beecher get back to his pulpit and work on "brightening up old-fashioned principles."[13]

Others more radical than Beecher echoed his concern about the growing gulf between the rich and the poor which had been made so evident by the suffering of the panic. And, they also saw the need to go beyond charity and to approach the problem on a functional, legislative level. Some, such as freethinker D. M. Bennett's Truth Seeker, suggested a heavy tax on wealth as a means of its control.

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[13] Boston Daily Globe, Boston Morning Journal, Oct. 3 to Oct. 6.

"Let the excessively rich be excessively taxed," ran one editorial, "even to ten and twenty-five per cent annually, until it ceases to be profitable to be excessively rich."[14]

Inherent in such a view, especially when coupled with the suggestion that the proceeds of such a tax be used for the benefit of the poor, was the opinion that poverty was neither providential nor a fault of the poor. "Pauperism is a crime," said the Index, "but not a crime of the pauper. It is a crime of his governors--the whole body of the successful and contented. Ignorance is the blunder, not of its victims, who cannot help themselves, but of their rulers, who can help them if they will. It is in the power, and it is in the province, of government, especially if it is municipal, to prevent both."[15]

It was this increasingly environmental explanation of poverty which best characterized the reform moralism of the progressive churchmen. The Advance, a Chicago Congregational paper, gave its explanation of poverty not a theocentric interpretation but an historical one. In the early decades of the history of the United States, there were no poor, i.e., no permanent class without any hope of vertical mobility. This, it was claimed, was a result of the "extent and fertility of the soil and the thinness of the population." But now, the Advance noted, a second stage had arrived. The "vast territory and virgin soil" no longer "opened to all a source of livelihood." It was the task of the Christian, the paper charged, to consider the

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[14] Truth Seeker, Mar., 1874; also Index, Mar. 5, 1874.

[15] Index, Mar. 5, 1874.

meaning of these trends in relation to the church's objectives.[16]

But it must be stressed that there was still a strong moral imperative in the liberal clergy's interpretation of social affairs. Certainly one had to be able to see these events in technical terms and to understand them as such. But beyond this, there was also a compulsion to correct the flaws which were thus revealed in accord with Christian principles. This moral imperative can be seen, for instance, in the attitude of Beecher's Christian Union toward the labor movement. It was quite easy, it noted, when workers assembled to demand work in the midst of hard times, for the conservatives to "denounce their folly and to applaud the police for guarding the peace against them." Quite easy, but it was not a sufficient answer for the Christian, at least not if Christianity were as Beecher understood it. In the first place, it was the Christian's duty to recognize social imperfections. It was to these imperfections that the labor radicals, in ways, to be sure, of which Beecher did not always approve, addressed themselves. But, the Christian Union warned, our duty was not done if we simply made mental acknowledgement of the validity of some of their claims. More importantly, "on us rests the responsibility of seeing that the defects [of the social fabric] be made good, its foundations made to square with Christ's law of love, its every detail made to yield the utmost to justice and beneficience. It must not be left to our children to fight down an atheistic and selfish Commune; we must anticipate that work by building more perfectly a Christian society."[17] Note clearly that the charge is to the churchmen to make a more just

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[16] Advance, Jan. 22, 1874.

[17] Christian Union, Jan. 4, 1874.

and a more Christian society and not to preach reconciliation and repentance to those who attacked the social order. The divergence with the orthodox view was just this: Beecher saw the workers' plight not as the result of their sin and resultant retribution, but as a social phenomenon. And the responsibility for this and the onus of sin, if it be sin, for its existence lay upon those who held and misused the social power.

This empathy with the demands, if not always with the methods, of labor radicals and the identification of the origins of this radicalism not with infidelity and atheism but with conservative injustice was shared by some other churchmen. Roman Catholic Bishop Spalding pointed out that socialists and communists did not appear without cause; "their mental and moral state is the necessary result of what society has made them."[18] The Index suggested that the way to halt communism was not doctrinal preaching but a tax on wealth. "Instead of waiting for the mob to call on their (republican) lordships in the name of the Commune, we would spare their nerves and their silver tea-sets, by sending tax-gatherers in the name of a sagacious government; instead of the trembling hand of the obsequious missionary."[19]

The key was the understanding that the individual Christian and the church collective could and in fact had a responsibility for social reform. Quite simply, the old answers of revivalism, moral education, doctrinal preaching, and benevolence were no longer sufficient. Certainly it was important to preach the gospel and to admin-

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[18]Agnes Claire Schroll, The Social Thought of John Lancaster Spalding (Washington: Catholic Univ. Press, 1944), 266.

[19]Index, Mar. 5, 1874.

ister the sacraments to the poor--if democracy were anywhere it must be in the church. But for the new generation of clergymen, "the responsibility of Christians in this matter," as the Christian Union pointed out, does not "end with carrying religion among the classes. There is another duty: it is to study carefully and in a disinterested spirit the questions which are coming forward as to the distribution of wealth and the duties of political society to its members."[20] There would not necessarily be an agreement on the results of this question of technical analysis; certainly there would be various answers given and differences of opinion as to the proper method of proceeding, but no one could dispute the necessity of beginning.

This emphasis upon voluntarism or activism was vital to the reform moralism of the liberals. Henry Ward Beecher, who in these early days served as a popularizer for these views, stressed this point frequently in his sermons from the pulpit of Brooklyn's Plymouth Church. One such sermon, delivered in the wake of the September financial collapse in reply to those who urged the country to be patient and to trust in God's providence to provide a solution to the crisis, chose as its text the last portion of Ephesians 6: 13. The verse was "And having done all, stand." In this brief phrase Beecher found a framework for an active approach to social catastrophe. Patience could only come after all possible action, not in place of it. In a passage which shows aspects of the liberal conception of the unity of the cosmos, Beecher urged his listeners to follow this advice:

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[20]Christian Union, Feb. 4, 1874.

> Enlarge your idea of God's providence, Make the horizon of your faith broader. Fill the heavens full of the evidences of divine love. Remember that nature is nothing but providence under another name.
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> Emphasis has been put upon the divine order of things--upon decrees, along which, as a turnpike, it is supposed that God has built up institutions and plans and purposes with which we are scrupulously to take heed that we do not unduly interfere.
>
> Much has been said about the danger of touching God's ark with unhallowed hands; and men have thought because they must not touch the ark, that they had no right to take hold of the cart itself, and help to draw it. 21

But Beecher urged a more activistic view of man's responsibilities. "And having done all," he repeated, "stand." But not until then.[22]

Such interpretations of Scripture drew heavy attacks from orthodox churchmen. Beecher himself was probably attacked more viciously than anyone, perhaps, ironically, because he was less radical than many and thus still close enough theologically to many of the conservatives to be most uncomfortable. But Beecher, staunch churchman that he was, answered those who complained that he preached sentimental reform rather than Christian doctrine in a revealing bluntness:

> Oh, what sentimentalism is this! /Christ/ said nothing about the Catechism or Confessions of Faith, or anything of that sort; He said: 'Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor hear the Gospel preached to them. 23

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[21]Sermon of Dec. 14, Plymouth Pulpit, Dec. 27.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Sermon of November 27, Plymouth Pulpit, Dec. 13.

This stress upon a moral activism drawn out of a technical analysis of the problems themselves was a focal point of the liberal world-view. And, if in the 1870's, it was not always clearly defined, perhaps only half existant in some people, it was nonetheless in the direction of the social gospel which came to fruition in the last years of the century. "If this be sentimentalism," Beecher thundered, "it is the sentimentalism of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the heaven; and I glory in it. If you call that spirit a spirit of infidelity, then I am an infidel, and I would to God that you were too."[24]

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[24] Ibid.

Increasing Dogmatism

The conservatives did not take this attack upon their cherished principles lightly. Indeed, they launched a vehement counterattack designed to discredit not only the reform views of the more liberal churchmen, but also the very philosophic principles which underlay them. They were well aware of the tie between heterodoxy and reform. Princeton economist Lyman Atwater, for instance, was certain that an admission of the principles of Auguste Comte would "end with the overthrow of all ordinances and institutions."[1] Charles Krauth was convinced that it was irreligion that "lays the foundation for Red Republic, and builds upon it a structure of absolute despotism."[2]

This assumption of a tie between skepticism and the ever increasing demands for social change had two implications for the conservative minds of the 1870's. First, their natural distaste for skepticism prejudiced their evaluation of proposed social and political reform. Who, after all, could favor anything if it were advocated by someone who questioned the very existence of God? All wisdom, they were convinced, began with God and any system which began elsewhere was, by definition, destructive.

If the tie between atheism and reform closed the conservative mind to any real evaluation of progressive ideas upon their own merits, it also set the tone for the conservative rebuttal. Since social

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[1] Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXVIII (Jan., 1856), 74.

[2] Charles P. Krauth, "Introduction" to his translation of Hermann Ulrici, Strauss as a Philosopher (Phila.: Smith, 1874), 63-64.

radicalism was but a function of irreligion, it followed that the proper method of combatting unorthodox social views was not to attack them per se, but rather to confront the heterodoxy which lay behind them. Thus it was that the orthodox press spewed forth page after page of polemic against what was generally designated "modern skepticism."

The conservatives were quite aware of the formidable nature of their foe. A Long Island minister, writing in the Presbyterian Quarterly, was quite blunt in expressing this opinion:

> The plain truth is that the Christian faith is menaced now by opponents as deadly as any that it has ever grappled with, and has before it a struggle the severity of which, in all probability is to take rank with the most memorable of the past. . . . [3]

Included under the clerical anathema were German idealism, the pantheistic beliefs of Spinoza, Schelling and Hegel, the positivism of Comte, Mill, and Spencer and "materialism," a term which served as a catch-all for anything else theologically suspicious. Sometimes simply categorized as French positivism and German absolutism (or pantheistic transcendentalism) these heterodox positions were viewed as the sources of the world's current predilection for social radicalism.[4]

Most baffling of all these heresies was Comtian positivism, which although not specifically atheistic, did deny the ability of man to know whether God was or was not. Avowed atheism, theologians felt able to deal with, but this nescience, a subtle atheism in the opinion of

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[3] Rev. Thomas Nichols, "Modern Skepticism," Presbyterian Quarterly, III (Apr., 1874), 235.

[4] Ibid., 237-241; also Lyman Atwater on Auguste Comte, Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XVIII (Jan., 1856), 60-61.

the orthodox, was more difficult to confront and therefore more dangerous. The orthodox clergymen attacked positivism from several directions. First, they were quite free in their attacks on the positivist conception of sequential causation which contradicted their providential one. They also inveighed against the "unchristian" nature of the Comtian view of historical progression.[5]

The orthodox were well aware that the Comtist was not, strictly speaking, an atheist but merely an agnostic. The clergy felt, however, that nescience was but a minor way station on the road to avowed atheism, a very precarious position between belief and unbelief. It was therefore equally dangerous with atheism, if not more so because it caught the unsuspecting mind. "An active mind," warned the Baptist Quarterly, "cannot tolerate perpetual doubt. The thorough skeptic soon passes from doubt to denial." And again, "the final aim of skepticism is disbelief; it seeks doubt and difficulty, not that it may overcome them, but that it may surrender to them."[6] When all the evidence was collected, they might as well have been atheists from the start. Quite simply, wrote one Catholic editor, "the latest and ablest representatives of the atheistic science of the ages are the Positivists,

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[5]The typical argument used against Comte at this point was that, if there was any truth at all in this explanation, it must at least admit that most men are rather motley mixtures of all stages rather than one or another. See Hodge, Systematic Theology, I, 258. This same criticism was also voiced by other positivists such as Spencer and his American disciple Fiske. This charge is, however, basically unfair. Comte agrees that the stages can be concurrent. He has theological and metaphysical ideas conflicting to cause the basic stalemate of Western thought. (Positive Philosophy, 416-418, 534). He is, in fact, quite explicit: "The three states, theological, metaphysical, and positive, may and do exist at the same time in the same mind in regard to different sciences." (ibid., 534).

[6]Baptist Quarterly, VII (Jan., 1873), 52-53.

or followers of Auguste Comte, and Cosmists, or admirers of Herbert Spencer."[7]

Churchmen were particularly bitter over the positivist tendency to give science province over all that man can know and religion province over all that he cannot. Little wonder, wrote A. J. Balfour, that the church should be less than enthusiastic with their enemy's generosity:

> [Spencer's] method is a simple one. . . . He divides the verities which have to be believed into those which relate to the Knowable and those which relate to the Unknowable. What is knowable he appropriates, without exception, for science, what is unknowable he abandons, without reserve, to religion. . . . The one possesses all that can be known, the other all that seems worth knowing. With so equal a partition of the spoils both combattants should be content. 8

To most churchmen the highest absurdity was the positivist assertion that it was actually beneficial to man to realize that he could not gain assurance of absolute knowledge. It was precisely the opposite, they claimed. Science could not exist without the assurance of a providential order. What Comte felt was a pollution of the pursuit of science, the orthodox clergymen, like Noah Porter, saw as the corner stone. It was quite simple. "We assume," Porter stated, "that this absolute exists in order that thought and science may be possible."[9] "Skepticism," charged one Baptist writer, was the precise

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[7] Brownson's Quarterly Review, I (Oct., 1873), 443.

[8] A, J. Balfour, Foundations of Belief quoted in A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy (N.Y.: Oxford, 1920), 58.

[9] Porter, Human Intellect, 662.

opposite of "scholarship."[10]

Not only did the orthodox argue that a belief in God was necessary for a suitable theory of education and secular knowledge, but that it was also a sine qua non of individual stability. Porter warned that if a man denies God or even that God can be known, he abandons all hope--intellectual, moral, and social. He becomes "morose and surly, or sensual and self-indulgent."[11] The Episcopalian American Church Review also believed that attempts to shake the basic theocentric interpretation of man's life were the first steps toward degradation:

> The tendency of such efforts to expel the supernatural from the system of things and to confound the spiritual and material must be to procure the most deplorable results in the sphere of morals, of society, and of politics. 12

The orthodox' favorite example of the damage of positivism to mental serenity was John Stuart Mill's melancholy Autobiography published in 1873. Almost to a man, the clerical reviewers of this book were impressed by what they assumed to be the sadness resulting from his lack of spiritual peace. Mill was "the most tragic spectacle of the century," many declared, and more to be pitied than maligned.[13]

The ultimate result of the skepticism, of course, was the tendency to place man upon the throne of God, to expound a confidence that man was his own master, possessing the ability to solve his problems and handle his own affairs if he had sufficient technical knowledge. This was precisely the point, of course, which the liberal

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[10] Baptist Quarterly, VII (Jan., 1873), 48.

[11] Porter, Fifteen Years, 263.

[12] American Church Review, XXV (Jan., 1873), 103.

[13] Christian Intelligencer, Jan. 1, 1874, is a typical example.

theologians adopted in a modified version and incorporated along with a religious motivation in their reform moralism. But it was also the part of secular thought which most frightened the orthodox and one which they listed as not the least of the panic's causes. It was the ultimate sacrilege to attempt to dispense with theocentric explanations of phenomenal events. It was, bemoaned Lyman Atwater, simply a "fresh illustration of the tendency of depraved reason to dispense with the idea of God. Such is the perversity of man's intellect, that if able to account for the creation /for example/ on any other theory than that of a Creator, he will disregard even the evidence of intuition and revelation."[14]

Within a short time, the clerical denunciation was extended to those liberal clergymen who extended intellectual sympathy to the views of positivism and even to those who refused to join in the orthodox polemic against the radicals. One such liberal churchman who had incorporated some modified positivist ideas in his own thought was O. B. Frothingham. The Pittsburgh Catholic, in a statement typical of many conservative weeklies, wrote that Frothingham's ideas meant "nothing more or less than the prostitution of freedom and the enthronement of ignorance and whim in the place where true enlightenment--the Enlightenment of Faith and Revelation--should have its undisputed abode."[15]

Perhaps the best example of the orthodox pressure upon their less dogmatic brothers in the 1870's was the case of David Swing, a

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[14]Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXX (Jan., 1858), 26-27.

[15]Pittsburgh Catholic, Oct. 25.

Presbyterian minister in Chicago. Swing held only moderately liberal views, certainly not as radical as many in other denominations, but nonetheless sufficiently radical to cause considerable tension within the Presbyterian polity. In April, 1874, Swing was brought to trial for heresy before the Presbytery of Chicago by Francis Patton, an ultra-conservative professor at the local seminary. The trial was well-publicized in the press and before long Swing's case had become a cause celebre in liberal circles. Swing was accused of a list of twenty-eight charges and a multitude of specifications under each. Among them were Unitarianism, mysticism, sympathy for evolution, denial of Biblical infallibility, and a flippancy toward baptism. Most of the weight of the attack, however, centered upon the first charge and its twenty-four specifications. Patton charged that Swing "has not been zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel; and has not been faithful and diligent in the exercise of the public duties of his office as such minister." Most interestingly, among the specifications listed to support this charge was "unworthy and extravagant laudation in the pulpit, and through the press of John Stuart Mill, a man who was known not to have believed in the Christian religion. . . ."[16] Also cited as proof was Swing's attempt to demythologize some of the Christian beliefs, a desire perilously close to the positivist demands for a deanthropomorphization of the concept of God. Also indicative of the nature of the conflict was the complaint that Swing was paying undue attention to the pragmatic effects of doctrines when he declared that "the value of a doctrine is measured

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[16] The Trial of Rev. David Swing before the Presbytery of Chicago (Chicago, 1874), 8. (This is a transcript of the trial).

by the ability of men to verify it in their experience."[17]

Swing was acquitted by the reasonably moderate local presbytery where he had, at any rate, the advantage of personal popularity. Patton would have appealed to a higher court where his chances would have been measurably increased, but Swing voluntarily left the church to organize an independent congregation in the city. He would not stay in the church, he explained, if he were forced to defend "dogma rather than love." For the time being, at least, the conservatives had succeeded in keeping the organized church theologically pure.

The Theology of Frustration

But such was the peculiar plight of the staunchly orthodox churchmen of post-Civil War America that even their victories were their ultimate defeat. The irony was that the very success of their battles with their liberal colleagues like David Swing increased their obstinacy and ultimately their anachronism. They fought hard, but in so doing, closed their own minds to the extent that even those who bore the promise of a vibrant intellect soon looked no further than their own stereotypes. So it was that Lyman Atwater could state candidly that it was unnecessary to even read the works of Mill to tell that they were erroneous. They were premised on the belief that "phenomena" were not explained by "supernatural agencies" and for Princeton at least, "that is enough."[18]

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[17] Ibid., 9; also William Hutchinson, Cyrus Hall McCormick (N.Y.: Appleton, 1930), II, 256, 288, for involvement of an important layman; The best source for this troubled period in the Presbyterian Church is Lefferts Loetscher, The Broadening Church (Phila.: Univ. of Pa. Press, 1954).

[18] Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review. XXVIII (Jan., 1856), 111.

This same dogmatism haunted the conservatives of all denominations, and led them to rely less and less upon intellectual discussion and more and more upon shallow appeals to faith which, if they could not be sustained alone, could in any event, be enforced by the power of the church's institutions. They were, as Orestes Brownson's biographer says of that Catholic conservative, "declaring war on the world in order to make /their/ own peace with heaven."[19]

Lest we be too harsh, however, it must be admitted that it was not easy for one to change the beliefs which have guided him for a lifetime, especially when they have sustained his intellectual life as well as his spiritual. In fact, one could not really expect less than a desperate struggle from the conservatives. Their entire world-view was at stake. As Francis Patton declared during his battle with David Swing,

> What makes me attempt to stem the tide of public sentiment is the consciousness of right, and what unseals my lips in a presence like this is the thought that I plead the injured cause of my crucified Lord. 20

The tenacity with which the conservatives held to their beliefs even gained some sympathy from their liberal enemies. Spencer and Fiske themselves admitted that every religious belief fulfills a purpose and a pyschological need for the person who holds it. If the conservatives held firmly to their belief it was because they were unable to grasp a more perfect conception of God which was now offered. If the orthodox still insisted on imposing transcendental interpretations

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[19]Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Orestes Brownson: A Pilgrim's Progress (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), 272.

[20]Swing Trial, 67.

upon social phenomena, it was because they were as yet unable to comprehend them in technical terms.[21] Another liberal, Minot Savage, felt that such tenacity was very understandable because the conservative religious leader had not only his soul but his entire concept of the universe, past and future, at stake. "You take away the anchor of his soul;" Savage admitted, "you cut the cable which bound him to any sure hope and abiding-place and he is set adrift to float, nobody knows where."[22]

In a very real sense, it was his whole cosmic view that the conservative was losing. Science and logic no longer existed so much for the benefit of religion as they did merely for the benefit of science and logic themselves. Not only was their idea of God under attack, but also the comfort which it had afforded them. For, even as Savage admitted, the death of a "wrong-doing God" was little comfort. Now man had to accept the harsh truth that evil is caused by his own ignorance and carelessness. Moreover, there was no longer the implication that evil tended ultimately toward a greater good. To some this meant the genesis of the modern optimistic activism based upon the belief that knowledge and not pietism was the cure for social ills. But to the conservative, who, in any case, saw the prospects of his pietism as more certain than those of the human race's accumulation of sufficient knowledge to ever control its own destiny, it was the source of despair.[23]

But if such predicaments called forth understanding, there were

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[21] Spencer, First Principles, 118-119ff.

[22] Savage, Religion of Evolution, 13.

[23] Ibid., 110.

other elements in the psychology of conservatism which were less easy for the liberals like Savage to accept. One such motivation was the intellectual vested interest which the churchmen had in their theology. In many cases, the leading church scholars had sanctified their dogma by a lifetime of teaching and publication until now their academic reputation rested upon the survival of orthodoxy. For such men change became a virtual demon in a personal sense as well as in the broader search for truth. Their stake in their theological position was quite clear to the clergy themselves and frequently taunted by members of the laity. To Savage, such vested conservatism was worse than scandalous. "One might suppose," he bemoaned, "that the chief

> anxiety of men would be, not to prove that they are right, but to find out if they are right. And yet I have met men among my own personal friends who would tell me candidly, and with their whole hearts, that so dear to them had become the positions that they had inherited, even if they were false, they did not wish to find out; they did not wish to be disturbed; they did not wish to be compelled to re-adjust their thinking to any new truths: for it is one of the ineviatble facts of the world that a new truth is an "unsettler" everywhere. [24]

Thus it was that the very strength of the orthodox belief became its greatest handicap when faced with science and social confusion. Their institutional command drove out the young, dynamic minds and their dogmatic scholasticism bound them into a peculiarly paradoxical position. Thus by the 1870's, conservative moralism had ceased to be a dynamic force and was now little more than a static defense.

As we have seen earlier, for those Protestants who followed the path of evangelism, social change came from converting individuals.

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[24] Ibid., 12.

For high church Protestants and Roman Catholics, moral education performed the same function. The assumption was that society was so ordered that the pious inevitably rose to the top. In their providential context, therefore, by calling for revivalism or moral education, as the case might be, they were not being apathetic or seeking to avoid the issues of their day. Rather they were actually seeking to be involved at the very depths of the problem--at least at what they considered to be the very depths. It was this great faith which blinded them to the barriers to vertical mobility which were now present in an urbanized, industrial society. The paradox, therefore, is that their lack of involvement in viable social reform stems precisely from their desire to become involved. The source of the paradox was that true involvement in fundamental reform required a technical view of man in society which they thought undermined the very church and theology which they were trying to implement in reaching solutions for the problems of their time. To accept involvement on less than theocentric terms meant the death of their theology. But to attempt it on that basis was becoming impossible.

The dilemma was frustrating. To be involved was to accept at least some of the new proposals from the social sciences and therefore to destroy at least part of their theology. To maintain their orthodoxy in the face of mounting criticism was to find the church falling away from reality and the working masses away from the church. To make matters more complex, the theologians who controlled the churches had, as well as a deep-seated belief in the truth of their doctrines, a vested interest in their survival as their personal theological and institutional handiwork. Even the methods led them

into deep difficulty. For the paradox was that it was the strictest conservatives who were most akin to the positivists in many ways. They, too, disdained any speculative thought; they, too, professed to base their system purely upon the facts, upon the data at hand, and to admit nothing that was not inherent in the relationship of the data. But their definition of the Scriptures as the sole source or total body of data placed their rationalistic, inductive method in grave jeopardy from the scientific attacks upon the very pillar of the scholasticism, Biblical inerrancy. Thus, at a time when creative minds were broaching new dimensions of thought and action, the scholastic theologians who ruled the church structure were bound up in a struggle for a literal interpretation of Holy Scripture.

As so often is the case when one is faced with unpleasant alternatives, one clings with even greater zeal to the old ways. This was the case with the conservatives after the Civil War. Their once powerful, dynamic orthodoxy now became the theology of frustration. So they held to a belief in the efficacy of their pietism with all the strength they could muster.

The only sign of vibrant new life in the camp of orthodoxy after the Civil War was the evangelism of revivalist D. L. Moody, whose great crusade followed in the wake of the Panic of 1873. But even his success was an ultimate failure for orthodoxy, because as Bernard Weisberger has pointed out so astutely, "in bringing the revival up to date with the billboard and the trust, he hindered a re-examination of its theological core, on a popular level. His preaching froze a part of American Christianity into nostalgia and created a ready-made body of listeners for some men who, without

his charity, were as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."[25]

This complement of nostalgia and frustration continued to conveniently provide the comfort of the traditional in the face of the novel for those persons who demanded it. To those persons, especially those who had recently left rural areas, faced with the strange, impersonal complexities of urban life, it gave the continued assurance that they, by their piety, had a formula for success.[26]

And, at the same time it provided the intellectual theologians with a rationale for ignoring the very currents of new thought which proved so unsettling. Because so long as they emphasized the sovereignty of God then, quite neatly, any attempts at man-centered, institutional reform--all those disconcerting positivist notions--were simply illusory and irrelevant.

So the conservatives kept on, determined to hold fast even if all fell about them, for in truth they believed deeply in their own words. But in many cases that belief came to be expressed in words which betrayed more hollow rhetoric than commitment, impassioned yet somehow very distant. It was but another sign of how far they had drifted from reality. But nonetheless they held fast to what they had, hoping that somehow their steadfastness and their faith would be their vindication. One can almost imagine Charles Hodge finding meaning in the words of St. Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

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[25]Bernard Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Boston: Little Brown, 1958), 177-178.

[26]Ibid., 168-169.

CONCLUSIONS AND AN EPILOGUE

Two basic trends have therefore become evident. The conservative theologians, on the one hand, stung by both the intellectual and social challenges of the 1870's, drew back and held fast to their old dogmas although these once vibrant examples of their faith became increasingly a theology of frustration and a mechanism for an escape from the reality of the industrial age. The liberals, on the other hand, men younger in age and philosophy, accepted much from the positivistic spirit of the sciences, linked it with a continuing religious zeal, and moved toward a revitalized theology and a social Christianity.

What an examination of the verbal response of the American churchmen to the Panic of 1873--considered as a case study in their social attitudes--has suggested, is that the fundamental theological difference between these two groups, namely the conservative retention of a providential world-view or pietistic moralism versus the reform moralism of the liberals, led to two conflicting approaches to the environment which in turn determined the character of their socio-economic positions. The conservatives, because economic catastrophe had so long been inexplicable in natural terms, couched their analyses of such events in transcendental terms. They were therefore conceived as peculiarly spiritual events demanding essentially spiritual remedies. The conservative economic views of the clergy were therefore only the consistent outgrowth of this theocentric world-view.

Conversely, the absence of this particular providential thesis

was the necessary common ground for those who held a more liberal, worldly interpretation of the crisis of 1873. Not only does the distinction between a providential and a technical world view form a crucial criterion for the separation of orthodoxy and the social gospel, but it is so vital that a retention of the former did indeed form a "steel chain of ideas," to borrow a phrase from Eric Goldman, which had to be broken and recast before any socially active church could be a reality.

To be certain, many individuals--Charles Loring Brace for example--had already broken the grasp of the providential thesis and were actively involved in melioristic social work considerably before the Civil War. But much of this work was done by organizations, which while religiously motivated, were independent of strict denominational control. One such organization, the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, was quite explicit in its rejection of the transcendental interpretation of the panic. In its 1874 report, it made the following comment on the source of the panic: "It is enough to know that it was the result of economic errors, which were not the work of God but of man."[1] Indeed it can be said that before charity organizations could really address themselves to the physical needs of the poor, they had to, at least to some degree, drift away from the strictly evangelical creed which had generated them. So, while they retained the zeal and the religious motivation characteristic of the strictly evangelical organizations, they developed a suspicion of religious panaceas and directed

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[1]New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Thirty-first Annual Report, 1874, p. 23.

their efforts toward what they deemed more practical, material aid for the poor. Brace, for example, complained that ". . . there is too great a confidence in technical religious means." This was not to deny that Christianity was an "absolute necessity" for a successful reform program, "but the mistake we refer to, is a too great use of, or confidence in, the old technical methods--such as distributing tracts, and holding prayer meetings, and scattering Bibles."[2]

But if this advanced attitude was already prevalent among independent benevolent organizations in the 1870's, it was not yet the accepted view of the academic theologians who controlled the church press and the institutional structure of the various denominations. Rather, they remained solidly behind the theocentric interpretation of social catastrophe and it was not for another twenty-five years that the major denominations accepted a social gospel as their official theological position.[3]

Since our study of the verbal response to the Panic of 1873 turns our interest toward previously neglected theological themes such as special providence, causation, and the possibility of knowledge of ultimates, it has also shed new light on the connection between positivism and the theological changes of the late 19th century, a facet of intellectual history long obscured under a blanket of concern for the lesser impact of Darwinian evolution. Essentially

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[2]Charles Loring Brace, The Dangerous Classes of New York (New York, 1872), 75-76.

[3]For information on the acceptance of the social gospel in the American churches, see Charles Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1940) or Robert T. Handy, The Social Gospel in America, 1870 to 1920 (N.Y.: Oxford, 1966).

what positivism provided was the intellectual stimulation for the abandonment of the providential interpretation. By its very nature, it demanded a major renovation of theology and the creation of a new apologetic. It therefore provided the antithesis which, when placed against the thesis of evangelical religion resulted in social Christianity.

The process of accomodation, as we have seen, began quite slowly, at times almost imperceptibly. Ultimately, however, a new apologetic theology arose. It was, as we have seen, synthetic in form, the result of the opposition of orthodoxy and positivism. There was little patience for those who demanded one or the other. Theodore Munger, one of the young liberals, was harsh in his condemnation of those who felt that they must have either "Calvin or Herbert Spencer, the old creed or no Bible, blind fear offset by blind audacity."[4] Rather, what they sought was a religious realism, a culling of the benefits of both orthodox evangelicalism and secular positivism. In a sense, it was a union of the evangelical zeal and the heritage of activism with the practical ability of the social sciences to examine society on a technical level.

This synthetic result was reflected in several organizations in the late nineteenth century in which liberal clergymen and the followers of positivism tried to formulate specific plans of action. The earliest of these was the American Social Science Association, founded in October, 1865. Among the members of this group were Daniel Gilman, D. Ames Wells, F. B. Sanborn, E. L. Youmans, T. Dwight

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[4]Theodore Munger, The Freedom of Faith (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1883), 5.

Woolsey, and O. B. Frothingham. Its list of honorary members included Bronson Alcott, Charles Loring Brace, and John Stuart Mill.[5] They were men, therefore, who were generally products of the pre-Civil War liberal reform movements or precursors of the empirical, scientific atmosphere of the post-Covil War society.

The group declared its purpose to be ". . . to collect all facts, diffuse all knowledge, and stimulate all inquiry, which have a bearing on social welfare."[6] The success of the organization, however, was limited, perhaps because it looked back as well as forward and therefore was never totally dedicated to either the idealistic pre-Civil War philosophies of reform or the empirical, scientific approach of the post-Civil War age. It seemed never able to shake itself free from the past and came under attack from the more radically empirical Popular Science Monthly for neglecting dispassionate study for schemes "hot with impulses of philanthropy." The complaint of Popular Science was that the Social Science Association "fails to do that for which, judging from its title, it was specifically instituted. So far from promoting social science, we would say social science is just the subject which it particularly avoids. It might generally be considered a general reform convention."[7]

But whatever the shortcomings of the American Social Science Association itself, it did prove the forerunner of a more influential and more successful organization, the American Economic Association

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[5]Journal of Social Science, VI (1874), 3; American Social Science Association, Constitution, Address, and List of Members (Boston, 1866), 8-9.

[6]Ibid., 15.

[7]Popular Science Monthly, V (July, 1874), 367-368.

founded in 1885. This organization, perhaps better than any other, illustrates the merger of religion and positivism into social awareness. Richard Ely, its founder, saw it as an attempt to develop a "system of social ethics" or "practical Christianity." Along with the Christian Social Union which Ely founded with William D. P. Bliss in 1891, it shows his determination to translate Christianity into a socially meaningful form. Although Ely seldom expressed himself in strictly theological terms, it is clear that he was devoted to a Christianity which included an "ethical sociology."[8] He commented in his book The Social Aspects of Christianity,

> I take this to be my thesis; Christianity is primarily concerned with this world, and it is the mission of Christianity to bring to pass here a kingdom of righteousness and rescue from the evil one and redeem all our social relations. 9

It was this dedication to bring the social order into harmony with God's law rather than bringing men into harmony with an already divine social order which best characterized the social gospel. The influence of positivism on the social gospel can only be suggested here, but it is important to note that an important key is the positivist attack on the theocentric interpretation of social phenomena which directed the church outward rather than upward in its social outlook. And because the churchmen came to see God as immanent, it became both possible and essential to reach him through humanity. In time many of the traditional Christian concepts were given an added social dimension to accord with this general tendency. Sin,

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[8]Benjamin G. Rader, "Richard T. Ely: Lay Spokesman for the Social Gospel," Jour. of American History, LIII (June, 1966), 66.

[9]quoted by ibid., 72.

for instance, for men like Lyman Abbott, became "inhumanity, for you can only injure God by injuring his children." Likewise, "the only repentence toward God is humanity, for you can only return to him by serving his children."[10] Social action and concern, therefore, became a necessity for the church. In fact. as time went on, the activity itself became the best apologetic. As one contemporary wrote, it was certainly still important to define and discuss, but at the same time ". . . it has become clearer that Christian apologetic can never be satisfactorily separated from the positive exhibition of the Christian system. . . . Christianity, in short, is it own best apology."[11]

Although this evolution of which we have been speaking had its roots deep in the nineteenth century, it was not until Walter Rauschenbusch wrote his A Theology for the Social Gospel in 1917 that the decades of work were finally coordinated into a formally presented theological system. There had long been, he recognized, a need for "a theology large enough to contain the social gospel, and alive and productive enough not to hamper it."[12] This was the goal toward which the struggles of men like Shields, Beecher, McCosh, and Bascom were directed. In some ways the connection was unconscious, for one doubts whether any pioneer can adequately envisage the results of his efforts, but in other ways it was quite conscious because these early men demanded, above all, a gospel large enough to fulfill the ethical

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[10]quoted by Ira V. Brown, Lyman Abbott (Cambridge: Harvard, 1953), 111.

[11]James Orr, The Progress of Dogma (Pittsburgh, 1897; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 322.

[12]Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1917), 9.

demands which they placed upon it.

That the task was not quickly accomplished is not surprising. That it spread from the work of Theodore Parker in the 1830's to that of Walter Rauschenbusch writing now in the midst of the First World War (a time not coincidentally coterminous with the industrialization of the nation) is not necessarily a condemnation of the men who lived in those years and were unable to manage the complexities of the problem for it was indeed a task of immense difficulty. Rauschenbusch recognized this quite well himself when he wrote, perhaps as a disclaimer, that "the adjustment of the Christian message to the regeneration of the social order is plainly one of the most difficult tasks ever laid on the intellect of religious leaders."[13]

Rauschenbusch stands therefore as both the intellectual heir and the culmination of the intellectual ferment which we have been discussing in the 1870's. It is not the purpose of this work to comment at length on the work of Rauschenbusch, but perhaps it will help clarify the significance of the trends we have noticed in the 1870's to point briefly to their fruition in his theology. The key to the continuity is his rejection of the orthodox religious interpretation of social catastrophe. It was something which he denied explicitly:

> To interpret the sufferings imposed by social injustice in individualistic terms as the divine chastening and sanctification of all individuals concerned, is not only false but profoundly mischievous. It is the equivalent of 'dope,' for it silences the warning which the suffering of an innocent group ought to

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[13] Ibid., 7.

> convey to all society without abolishing the causes. [14]

What he is saying, of course, is that the imposition of an additional spiritual message would lead to an unbearable social conservatism--which is precisely what happened to the orthodox churchmen in the 1870's.

What Rauschenbusch did was to give orthodox concepts like sin and salvation a worldly, rather than a distinctly spiritual context, a change which directed the attention of the church to social problems and enabled it to incorporate a technical dimension into its religious synthesis. He pointed out, for example, that rarely did man sin directly against God. "We rebel against God and repudiate his will when we set our profit and ambition above the welfare of our fellows and above the Kingdom of God which binds them together." He concluded that "the sinful mind, then, is the unsocial and anti-social mind."[15]

In terms of his interpretation of social catastrophe, Rauschenbusch essentially rejected the traditional Augustinian theodicy and replaced it with one based on a concept of the solidarity of the human race, a concept which some men, like Lester Frank Ward, saw as the greatest contribution of Comtist thought.[16] This permitted Rauschenbusch to explain social crisis as the result of other men's sin. One man sins, he believed, and the rest suffer. This was so because man is linked indissolubly to his fellow man, and the ill deeds of one

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[14] Ibid., 183.

[15] Ibid., 50, 48.

[16] V. L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (N.Y.: Harcourt and Brace, 1930), 198.

penetrate the society as a whole. "The idea of solidarity," Rauschenbusch said, "when once understood, acts as a theodicy."[17] What this was, then, was a theodicy which while still in religious terms, operated on a human level consistent and complementary to a scientific, technical appraisal of social issues on a man-man basis.

Significantly, redemption also was given a social, rather than a pietistic connotation. Rauschenbusch was very critical of the orthodox evangelical conception of holiness because it isolated man from man, i. e., it "concentrates on God, shuts out the world, and is conscious only of God and itself."[18] Rather, Rauschenbusch believed that the "way of holiness [was] through human fellowship and service," a form which might be "slower and lowlier" but had results that were "more essentially Christian."[19]

Rauschenbusch still held to a concept of personal salvation but it was considerably altered from the orthodox understanding. In the first place, this salvation was directed outward toward humanity. It had to be, for any attempt to circumvent humanity in an attempt to gain direct access to the infinite was impossible and an attempt to "set aside the fundamental law of God."[20] "Any mystic experience which makes our fellow-men less real and our daily labor less noble, is dangerous religion."[21]

The social gospel's conception of personal salvation also

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[17]Rauschenbusch, Theology, 183.

[18]Ibid., 103-104.

[19]Ibid., 104.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., 105.

differed from that of pietistic orthdoxy in that it was not utilitarian but prophetic in result. It furnished not material success but a demand for witness. In fact, it was this prophetic note, an ability to compare the status quo against the vision of the Kingdom of God, which best characterized Rauschenbusch's idea of regeneration.

> If the Holy Spirit works on his soul so that he has a vision of the Kingdom of God and its higher laws, then to some extent he will be living ahead of his age. In the qualities of his personality and in his judgments of men and society, he will challenge the right of the world as it is now. 22

This was the key: an ability to see the social order in its actual condition, to measure its shortcomings by the law of Christ, and to have the zeal to search for Christian improvements. This was the basic task--a title of one of Rauschenbusch's books--"Christianizing the Social Order."

This vision of the Kingdom of God was so crucial for Rauschenbusch that he saw its absence as the major flaw in the orthodox theology. "When the doctrine of the Kingdom of God is lacking in theology," he said, "the salvation of the individual is seen in relation to the Church and to the future life, but not in its relation to the task of saving the social order."[23] And, of course, this was the very critical difference between Rauschenbusch and the liberals and the older conservative orthodoxy. The earlier group had held to a pietistic conception of the social order. It was already divine. The task of the church was therefore not to Christianize the social order, but to Christianize individuals, that is, to bring them into

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[22] Ibid., 194.

[23] Ibid., 137.

harmony with an already perfect social order. But the cosmic view of the followers of the social gospel demanded the creation of a "fellowship of righteousness" rather than the acceptance of the present order. "Our chief interest in any millenium," Rauschenbusch claimed, "is the desire for a social order in which the worth and freedom of every least human being will be honored and protected; in which the brotherhood of man will be expressed in the common possession of the economic resources of society; and in which the spiritual good of humanity will be set high above the private profit interests of all materialistic groups."[24]

Putting such views into action created another whole realm of discussion and problems, but these were at the tactical level rather than at the strategic. By 1900 most of the denominations had accepted the propriety of social reform; the disputes thereafter dealt mainly with the proper method of proceeding. All of this is not at all to degrade the significance of the importance of the humanists who had been working diligently in melioristic social reform for well over 50 years; it is merely to point out the humanization, if not the secularization of the church as an institutional body and the evolution of formal theology necessary to accomodate that change.

But, of course, the achievement of the liberal apologetic and a social gospel was not synonymous with an achievement of perfection or even stability, because as the 20th century unfolded, it, too, came under attack from a younger generation of theologians. Perhaps its fault was that its stress on activity led too easily to a divorcing of that activity from the kerygma which supplied its essential moti-

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[24] Ibid., 224.

vation. Perhaps, that is, the social gospel slipped too easily into secular pragmatism, becoming as H. Richard Niebuhr complained, "all social and no gospel." Perhaps it was merely a lack of thoroughness, with too great an emphasis upon man's ability for righteous social action and not enough on the quite powerful forces pulling away from progress. Perhaps it simply could not stand optimistically in the presence of the world wars and depressions of the 20th century.

But for whatever reason, the theologians of the mid-20th century felt the compulsion to recapture the kerygma which they felt had been obscured in the zest for social reform. But just as significantly, the neo-orthodox theologians, despite their reiteration of the power and majesty of the infinite, did not return to the overwhelming emphasis upon providence which had characterized the old orthodoxy. As one contemporary commentator notes, "providence is the forgotten stepchild of contemporary theology."[25] In fact, some of the boldest statements to date against the type of providential theism so prevalent in the 19th century have come from neo-orthodoxy or post-neo-orthodox thinkers.[26]

Perhaps the essence of the situation is that as Paul Tillich has noted, "a theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic

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[25]Langdon B. Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," Jour. of Religion, XLIII (July, 1963), 174.

[26]The most outspoken example of this is in the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, esp. his Letters and Papers from Prison (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1953). There is also an abundance of such criticism in the work of the "Death of God" theologians, esp. those who claim a heritage from Bonhoeffer. A good place to begin an examination of this thought is Kenneth Hamilton, God is Dead: The Anatomy of a Slogan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).

needs: a statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation. Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received."[27] As Tillich goes on to note, not many systems are successful in balancing the two extremes. Instead, they are prone to sacrifice the kerygma for the situation, or to speak in such a manner as to lack communication with the situation. All of this speaks well for what Tillich calls a "method of correlation," a sort of perpetual interchange or dialectic between the two.[28]

But unfortunately, what so often happens, as it did in the 1870's, is that an apologetic theology, once propounded in accordance with a particular temporal situation, becomes confused with the kerygma itself. Eventually, time moves beyond the original occasion and the theologians find themselves dragging an outmoded apologetic into a new age. Within a short time they are speaking neither from the kerygma nor to the age. This was the tragedy of the conservative theologians of the 1870's: they spoke in supernatural terms to a society which was becoming more and more convinced of its ability to explain social disorders in purely natural terms. And yet they spoke with the resoluteness of one defending the kerygma itself rather than the accumulated wisdom or folly of the previous century.

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[27]Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 3.

[28]Ibid., 8.